PERCEPTIONS OF A GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE BAN: SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND ADVOCACY FOR STUDENTS WITH MINORITY SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

AMY MCCARTHY SIFFORD. Perceptions of a Gay-Straight Alliance ban: School counselors and advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations. (Under the direction of Dr. Pamela S. Lassiter.)

The purpose of this study was to examine how school counselors who are working or have worked in a school that banned a Gay-Straight Alliance club perceive the ban and how their perceptions influenced their advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations. Recommendations from participants for other school counselors who have experienced this phenomenon were also examined. Five school counselors participated in this qualitative research study. Participants were interviewed about their thoughts, feelings, and actions and completed a demographic questionnaire.

A modified phenomenological data analysis procedure using descriptive and axial coding was conducted to analyze the data. The analysis indicated that the participants perceived the ban as a way for administrators to avoid controversy or collude with the religiously and politically conservative status quo beliefs about minority sexual orientations in their larger communities. The participants engaged in a variety of strategies to resist status quo beliefs, and while they perceive positive changes since the bans, discrimination against students with minority sexual orientations continues and the pace of positive change remains slow. The participants recommended proactive advocacy as a way for other school counselors working in religiously and politically conservative areas to resist reproducing status quo beliefs about minority sexual orientations in the school environment.

The findings suggest that school counselors working in conservative settings who identify as advocates and have affirming attitudes about minority sexual orientations are willing to take risks to advocate for this student population. In addition, proactive advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations is necessary prior to attempting supportive services such as a Gay-Straight Alliance in schools in conservative areas. Finally, continued research concentrating on expanding the empirical literature base regarding advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations is needed in order to better prepare school counselors and their administrators to meet their needs.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this accomplishment to my husband, Michael Stephen Sifford. Through his strength and belief in me, I prevailed. Now it is your turn to pursue your dream.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

On the morning of February 12, 2008, in the cafeteria of E. O. Green Junior High School in Oxnard California, 14-year-old Brandon McInerney shot 15-year-old Lawrence "Larry" King two times in the back of the head. Students, faculty, and staff witnessed the shooting and while there were warning signs that the two students had issues between them, no one was prepared for the violent turn of events that left two young lives shattered, one through death, and the other through the commission of the act that caused it. Larry was gay, struggling with issues related to coming out in an environment hostile toward minority sexual orientations; Brandon was straight, struggling with Larry's open desire of a relationship with him and the ridicule his friends aimed at him because of it. Both students were considered high risk for reasons other than sexuality, including troubled home lives. In the end, students, faculty and staff suggest that both were victims of homophobic harassment that festered within the hallways of the school (Saillant, 2008; Setoodeh, 2008; Wilson, 2008).

According to an article in Newsweek magazine, as Brandon's trial nears there are inclinations that both Larry's and Brandon's supporters believe that the school, i. e. faculty and staff, is primarily culpable for Larry's death (Setoodeh, 2008). There are conflicting accounts regarding the response of faculty and staff to the level of homophobia in the hallways and Larry's defiant reaction against it. Some believe faculty and staff made an appropriate, adequate response while others believe the response was

inappropriate and insufficient. It appears that E. O. Green Junior High School may soon be among the growing number of schools faced with lawsuits for allegedly failing to take adequate steps to address homophobic harassment.

We cannot know what Larry's thoughts about his struggles were as he has been forever silenced. We may not ever know what Brandon's thoughts were that led him to believe the solution to his own struggles was to kill Larry. We may know, in time, what the thoughts of the school faculty, counselors, and other staff were that tried to intervene on behalf of one or both of the children, but for now, very little is being said due to pending criminal and possibly civil lawsuits against them (Sedooteh, 2008). However, we have heard the words describing the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors of other students who have endured homophobic harassment and bullying at school.

A decade of research into the school experience of students with minority sexual orientations indicates that physical and verbal harassment and internalized homophobia are significant barriers to their emotional, social, and academic development. Recent nationwide surveys indicate that up to 90% of minority sexual oriented and heterosexual students responding reported frequently hearing homophobic or sexist remarks at school (Elia, 1994; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008). These statistics are alarming given that verbal harassment of students with minority sexual orientations has often escalated into vicious physical attacks (American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU, 2007). Students with minority sexual orientations surveyed report higher levels of substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, and dropping out of school (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Remafedi, 1990). They also report higher levels of trauma symptoms, depression, and low feelings of self worth (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2007;

D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hersberger, 2002; Hetrik & Martin, 1987). Because of these conditions, the educational performance and aspirations of students with minority sexual orientations are lower than the national average (Kosciw, et al., 2008).

The research also continues to underscore that it is the pervasive intolerant and, at times, blatantly homophobic views of homosexuality in our society that perpetuates the hostility in our schools toward minority oriented students (Macgillivray, 2000; Macgillivray, 2004). Overall, policies are lacking in our educational systems that include protection from verbal and physical harassment based on sexual orientation (Russo, 2006). Further, many school systems with such policies often lack a uniform response to such harassment when it occurs (Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Russo, 2006). As a result, students with minority sexual orientations navigate their orientations and identities fearful of being discovered, fearful of losing friends, and/or fearful of being victimized in a school culture that is silent regarding their needs or struggling with how to meet them (Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Poteat & Espelage, 2007; Savin-Williams, 1994).

School counselors must be prepared to address these concerns. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is clear on its position that school counselors are ethically bound to advocate for students with minority sexual orientations. ASCA unequivocally maintains that the role of the school counselor regarding these students is to "promote affirmation, respect, and equal opportunity for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity" and "to promote awareness of issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity among students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community" (ASCA, 2004).

As per ASCA's ethical guidelines and standards, school counselors are required to confront barriers in the school environment such as verbal and physical harassment that impede the academic, personal and social, and career development of students with minority sexual orientations. School counselors are also required to provide support that promotes the well-being of these students. Attempts to change their orientation or viewing a non-heterosexual orientation as a disorder or a symptom of an underlying emotional problem are counter to ASCA's standards (ASCA, 2007a).

An abundance of theoretical articles recommends school counselors follow a tripartite model (awareness, knowledge, and skills) of acquiring competency for meeting their ethical obligation to advocate for students with minority sexual orientations. Foremost is becoming aware of personal biases and beliefs about sexual orientation as well as the overall school community's stance toward the issues and needs of people with minority orientations (ASCA, 2007a; Cooley, 1998; DiSilvestro, 1980). Other requisites for ethical action include acquiring knowledge about the coming out process, the negative impact of homophobia and heterosexism on the social, emotional, and physical development of people with minority sexual orientations, and the history of the struggle for their civil rights (ASCA 2007a; Nichols, 1999; Jeltova & Fish, 2005).

School counselors who are aware of their own biases and possess sufficient knowledge regarding the needs and issues of students with minority sexual orientations are poised to create a supportive and affirming school environment for them (Trusty & Brown, 2005). This is accomplished through actions such as addressing homophobic remarks made by students, faculty, and other staff (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001) and advocating for the inclusion of sexual orientation in antidiscrimination and bullying

policies (Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001). Other suggested activities include advocating for the inclusion of representation of people with minority sexual orientations in the general curriculum (Jeltova & Fish, 2005) and assisting students in the creation of student support group such as a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) club (Robinson, 1994; Uribe & Harbeck, 1991).

The literature clearly shows that students with minority sexual orientations are an identified at-risk and marginalized student population and the school experiences of many of them are far less than ideal. School counselors have a clear ethical obligation to advocate for and create safe and affirming school environments for these students. Therefore, it is a matter of ethical urgency (Birden, Gaither & Laird, 2000) that school counselors confront the ongoing physical and verbal violence in our schools toward students with minority sexual orientations. Not doing so may have tragic results as illustrated by Larry King's death.

Statement of the Problem

One of the most prevalent, effective, and most researched ways of providing supportive and affirming services to students with minority sexual orientations are GSAs (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, GLSEN, 2007). GSAs are student organizations designed to provide a safe and supportive environment for these students and their heterosexual allies. These organizations are student led and protected under the Equal Access Act (EAA), the law that provides non-curriculum clubs the same rights afforded to other clubs to meet at school and use school facilities (United States Code, 1984).

Research supports that the presence of a GSA is associated with a decrease in verbal and physical harassment, an increased visibility of supportive school staff, and an increased sense of school belonging (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Kosciw, et al., 2008; GLESN, 2007; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer 2006; Szalacha, 2003; Uribe & Harbeck, 1991). These results indicate that GSAs can achieve their stated objective for a safe, affirming environment for students with minority orientations. Regardless, there have been incidents in several states where GSAs were banned by school boards because of pressure from citizen groups that opposed them (ACLU 2007a). The support for these students that seems so desperately needed in our schools is often denied due to prejudice and discrimination in the larger culture.

School counselors are in an ideal position to address such incidents of discrimination against these students. There has been limited exploration in the literature regarding school counselors' experience of counseling or advocating for them. The available literature indicates the school counselors participating in research regarding students with minority sexual orientations generally believe that the level of homophobia in their school environments and larger communities is a serious problem they are ethically bound to address (Fontaine, 1998; Price & Telljohann, 1991). However, they feel neither adequately prepared to do so nor supported by administration and faculty when they try (Fontaine, 1998; Price & Telljohann, 1991; Sears, 1992). Exploring a GSA ban from the perspective of school counselors provides an opportunity to learn, in light of these findings, how they perform in their ethically mandated role as advocates for students with minority sexual orientations who have experienced discrimination.

This overview of the evidenced need for advocacy for students with minority orientations and statement of the research problem provides the foundation and motivation for this research. The sections to follow include a description the conceptual framework that informed this research, the research purpose and its significance, research questions, an overview of the research design, definition of key terms, specific delimitations, limitations, and assumptions, a summary and the organization of the study.

Conceptual Framework

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a conceptual framework explains the research topic's main ideas, purpose, and significance. This study is conceptually based on reproduction and resistance theory (Giroux, 1985), systematic cultural inclusion and exclusion of people with minority sexual orientations (Friend, 1993), and advocacy competency (Trusty & Brown, 2005). The following is a description of these theories in relation to the study.

Reproduction theory holds that schools are institutions designed to reproduce the values, beliefs, ideologies, and norms of the communities in which they are located (Giroux, 1985). Regarding sexual orientation, when the status quo in the larger community is heterosexist or, at worst, or homophobic, these conditions are reproduced and reinforced in the school environment through systematic exclusion and inclusion of students with minority sexual orientations (Friend, 1993). Systemic exclusion occurs when the needs of students with minority sexual orientations are ignored or their existence in the school environment is denied. For example, sexual education comprised of an abstinence only curriculum promotes that abstaining from sexual activity outside of marriage is the expected standard for all students thereby suggesting that heterosexual

marriage is the only type of union that is socially acceptable (Elia, 2003; Vergari, 2000). Systematic inclusion operates by framing discussions of non- heterosexual orientations as pathological or abnormal, thus implying that having a minority orientation is wrong (Holmes & Cahill, 2004). Systematic inclusion is demonstrated by the continued pervasiveness of homophobic language heard at school and the lack of a uniform, or any, response by school staff against it (Kosciw, et al., 2008; Russo, 2006).

Resistance theory (Giroux, 1985) holds that while the community's values, beliefs, ideologies, and norms are imposed on the formal and informal practices and policies of its schools, students, teachers, and parents often meet them with resistance aimed at transforming those practices and policies that are oppressive. Regarding the needs of students with minority orientations, their parents and gay rights activists have resisted homophobia in the schools by initiating lawsuits in order to force school systems to protect students from verbal and physical harassment based on sexual orientation. As a result, school systems across the United States have paid millions of dollars in damages because of school officials' unwillingness to protect students from anti-gay verbal harassment and physical assaults (ACLU, 2007a; Lambda, 1996). Nevertheless, school systems across the nation as a whole have been slow to implement formal policies to protect students with minority sexual orientations (Kosciw, et al., 2008; Russo, 2006).

Resistance to structures that perpetuate inequalities in the school environment and advocacy for school policies and practices that meet the needs of at risk student populations is required of school counselors (ASCA, 2007b). To do so, they must develop advocacy competency (Trusty & Brown, 2005). Advocacy competency involves dispositions, knowledge and skills. An advocacy disposition is the least malleable aspect

of a school counselors' identity and the most crucial in developing advocacy competency. School counselors with an advocacy disposition are autonomous in their thinking and behavior, are altruistic, and willing to take risks to help students meet their needs. Without these personal attributes, it is theorized school counselors will waver in acquiring the knowledge or developing the skills needed to effect systemic change.

Despite the fact that advocacy for students with minority orientations in the school environment has been established as a clear need in the literature, there has been little to no empirical research addressing how school counselors, who are ethically obligated to advocate for this population, address this need. There is an obvious lack of current knowledge related to how school counselors perceive discrimination against these students and how these perceptions affect their willingness and ability to advocate for them. Based on the lack of information currently available, this study addresses school counselors' perceptions of a ban on a GSA. As an integral component of the conceptual framework, details about the purpose and significance of this research are presented in the next section.

Purpose and significance of the study

The purpose of this study was to elicit the perceptions of school counselors employed by schools where a ban on a GSA occurred and how they made sense of this experience as a professional ethically bound to advocate for students with minority sexual orientations. Doing so was expected to add to the empirical knowledge and discussion of how school counselors perceive systemic barriers to educational equity and how their perceptions facilitate or impede advocacy on behalf of these students. This study was also

expected to inform the efforts of school counselor educators who seek to prepare trainees to be advocates for these students and other at risk student populations.

Trusty and Brown have identified a "dire" need (2005) for research studies regarding how school counselors develop advocacy competency in the school environment. There appears to be only one published study in the literature that examines how and when school counselors advocate in general on behalf of students (Field & Baker, 2004). The results indicated that the nine school counselors in this qualitative study were more reactive than proactive in their advocacy behaviors and none of their behaviors were geared toward systemic change but rather were focused on helping the students help themselves. No studies specifically addressing advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations were found; nor were studies regarding how advocacy competency is developed and manifested when needed in the school environment.

Field and Baker (2004) call for further research that may uncover what they describe as proactive and courageous strategies utilized by school counselors when advocating for a social issue or a marginalized group such as students with minority sexual orientations. Other prominent scholars and counselor educators are concerned that while the research shows these students are the most underserved, stigmatized, and at risk group in our school system (Russo, 2006; Uribe, 1994), the findings have had a little impact on making positive changes for them in the school environment (Stone, 2003).

Research Questions

This study explored the following research questions: (a) How do school counselors employed in schools that have banned a GSA perceive and describe their experience of the ban? (b) How did the counselors' experience of the ban influence their

advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations? (c) What suggestions do the participants have for school counselors facing similar situations?

Research Design

Qualitative research is appropriate when there is a need to present a detailed and in-depth view of a phenomenon that is multifaceted in nature. Purpose statements and research questions are framed by "how" or "what" versus "why" (Creswell, 2005). A phenomenological qualitative methodology was used for this study given that its intent was to explore how school counselors perceived and described a GSA ban and how their perceptions and descriptions impacted how they advocated for students with minority sexual orientations. School counselors with membership in ASCA who are working or were working in a school that banned a GSA were recruited to participate in confidential semi-structured interviews about the ban.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Other data sources were field notes taken during the interviews and a reflexive journal I kept throughout the data collection process. The data was analyzed, and interpreted in a manner consistent with phenomenological research methods, namely descriptive and axial coding. After analysis, the data was reconstructed to represent the essence of the participants' experience (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moustakas, 1994). A demographic questionnaire was constructed for the participants to complete in order to acquire a more detailed description of them (see Appendix F).

Verification procedures to enhance trustworthiness of the data collection, analysis, and interpretation included examining researcher subjectivity (Moustakas, 1994). Prior to data collection, I attempted to make all my biases explicit by describing

my interest in the research topic and my experience with discrimination against a student with a minority orientation (see *Researcher subjectivity* in Chapter Three and Appendix G). I also kept a reflexive journal throughout the research process to reduce the influence of researcher bias (Patton, 2002). To further increase the trustworthiness of my research, I utilized an audit trail, independent coder, member checking, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, thick description, and analytic triangulation (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were created from a combination of literature sources, including professional school counseling, counseling, education, and sociology as well as from professional organizations' ethical and best practice standards.

Minority sexual orientation

Minority sexual orientation is the term used in this research to describe a non-heterosexual orientation. This definition includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, and transgender orientations and identities.

Advocacy

Advocacy is operationally defined in this study as actively creating, supporting and implementing interventions that address the needs of all students in the school environment and larger community.

Advocacy Competency

Advocacy competency (Trusty & Brown, 2005) involves acquiring the dispositions, knowledge and skills required to effect systemic change. Advocacy competency includes embracing the role of advocate and a willingness to take risks and

challenge the status quo within the guidelines of professional ethics. Other components of Advocacy competency are skillful communication, collaboration, problem solving, and self-care.

Homophobia

Homophobia is an irrational fear or intolerance of people with minority sexual orientations or behavior that is perceived to go against traditional gender role expectations. Homophobia is expressed in ways ranging from exclusion of persons with minority sexual orientations to verbal harassment or physical violence against them.

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is discriminatory and biased attitudes that favor or privilege heterosexuality as the normal or superior sexual orientation. Heterosexism is expressed in ways ranging from the presumption that everyone is heterosexual to excluding persons with minority sexual orientations from receiving the same rights as heterosexuals regarding issues such as child custody, marriage, and insurance benefits.

Gay- Straight Alliance (GSA)

GSAs are student organizations found primarily high schools and universities that are designed to provide a safe and supportive environment for students with minority orientations and their heterosexual allies.

GSA ban

A GSA ban is defined as the inability of students and their faculty or staff sponsors, despite having followed the school's protocol, to form a Gay-Straight Alliance in their school.

Ally

A heterosexual who, after becoming aware of his or her own biases, attitudes, and beliefs about sexual orientation, supports and affirms people with minority orientations and takes action against homophobia and heterosexism. An ally also advocates for equal rights for people with minority orientations.

School Counselor/Professional School Counselor

School Counselor and Professional School Counselor are used synonymously in this research. They are operationally defined as certified or licensed school counselors who are employed as a school counselor and are members of ASCA during the GSA ban.

Participants were recruited in a variety of ways that are consistent with purposive and snowball sampling. They were recruited from the ASCA membership directory, through school email in areas where known bans occurred, and through distribution of flyers at events such as professional counseling conferences. Participants self-reported their professional status on a demographic questionnaire.

Assumptions

The first assumption about the study was that the participants answered truthfully the questions asked during the interview and their recollections about their experience of a GSA ban were accurate. A second assumption was that participants had varying degrees of experience as a school counselor and varying levels of advocacy competency. Finally, it was assumed that themes would emerge from the participants' descriptions of their experience of a GSA ban that reflected how it affected their ethical obligation to advocate for students with minority orientations.

Delimitations

Participants for the study were purposely recruited who were members of ASCA and delimited to school counselors who are or were working in a school setting that banned a GSA.

Limitations

There may be differences between the experience of school counselors who agreed to participate in the study and those who did not. There may also be differences between school counselors who are not members of ASCA that have experienced a GSA ban in their school setting. Further, sample size in qualitative inquiry always limits the transferability of the results (Wertz, 2005).

Summary

Chapter One provided an introduction regarding the importance of advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations in the school counseling profession. The inclusion of a GSA in the school environment appears to be an effective way to advocate for and provide supportive services to these students. The need for this study is pronounced by the continued prejudice and discrimination against these students as evidenced by the banning of GSAs due to community opposition. Ethical guidelines and positions statements of ASCA highlight the professional school counselor's obligation to advocate for these students. It was important to examine critical incidents such as a GSA ban from the perspective of school counselors in order to gain insight into how school counselors make decisions regarding their ethical obligations to advocate for students

with minority sexual orientations and, by extension, other at risk or marginalized populations.

Organization of the Study

This research study is divided into five chapters. An overview of the study was presented in Chapter One and includes an introduction to the research problem, statement of the research problem, and a description of the conceptual framework. Literature regarding the empirical study of advocacy by school counselors for students with minority sexual orientations, or the lack thereof, was summarized which illustrated the need for and significance of this research. Key terms used in the research were operationally defined and the methodology that was used to collect, analyze, and interpret data generated in this research was overviewed. Finally, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions were provided.

A detailed review of the literature is provided in Chapter Two. Topics included in the review are inequities in the school environment based on sexual orientation, the experience of students with minority sexual orientations in the school environment, the experience of school counselors working with these students, ASCA's ethical guidelines regarding these students, and the role of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in the school environment. An integrative summary of the literature reviewed will support the relevance of the study.

Chapter Three contains the methodology that was used to conduct this research. An introduction followed by the rationale for the use of qualitative methodology begins the chapter. The research questions and the interview protocol designed to answer them, and a pilot study for this research are described. The role of the researcher and researcher

subjectivity, as well as plans for recruiting participants and ensuring confidentiality, are detailed. The procedures for data collection, analysis, and interpretation are explained. Finally, verification procedures are discussed.

Chapter Four includes the findings of this research. A description of the participants begins the chapter. The data is displayed in a manner consistent with qualitative research. A narrative that describes in detail what was discovered from the research questions is provided. A summary of the findings concludes the chapter.

A discussion of the findings is presented in Chapter Five. The chapter begins with a summary of the findings and my interpretation of them. Next, a discussion regarding the study's limitations and contributions followed by recommendations for future research is presented. Lastly, my personal reflections about the research process are given.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter is a review of the literature regarding issues related to sexual orientation in the school environment. These issues include inequities in the school environment based on sexual orientation, the experience of students with minority sexual orientations in the school environment, the experience of school counselors working with these students, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) ethical guidelines regarding sexual orientation, and the role of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in the school environment. An integrative summary of the literature reviewed will support the relevance of the study.

Inequitable School Environments

School counselors are in an optimal position to advocate for students with minority sexual orientations (Field & Baker, 2004; Stone, 2003) due to their daily interactions across student systems, i.e. teachers, parents, peers, and administration. Whether or not they choose to advocate depends in part on their willingness and ability to do so. Barriers to action have been identified as internal (Fontaine, 1998; Price and Telljohann 1991; Sears, 1992) and systemic (Fontaine, 1998; Price and Telljohann 1991). Internal barriers include moral and religious objections to non-heterosexual orientations. These feelings often collide with ethical obligations and school counselors who believe students with non-heterosexual orientations are acting immorally may not believe it is in the students' best interest to advocate for what they may consider a deviant sexual

orientation (Fontaine, 1998). School counselors who want to be advocates and consider themselves allies may question their competency or feel inadequate when working with these students.

Systemic barriers include lack of support from administrators and other school staff to take a stand against homophobia in the school environment, school policies against harassment and discrimination that do not include sexual orientation, and community opposition to supportive services for students with minority sexual orientations (Sever, 2006). Further, some school counselors that have minority sexual orientations may struggle with their own fears of losing their jobs if their sexual orientation is discovered (Buckel, 2000). These barriers to advocacy aside, when the school environment is located within a community at large that opposes civil rights for people with minority sexual orientations, the greater the need for advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations.

Schools are institutions that reflect and reproduce the values, beliefs, ideologies, and norms of the larger culture. By design schools serve to perpetuate the status quo by socializing students accordingly (Giroux, 1985). Regarding sexual orientation, the status quo of heterosexism and homophobia is reproduced and reinforced in the school environment through what Friend (1993) describes as systematic exclusion and systematic inclusion. The former occurs when students with minority orientations are ignored or their existence in the school environment is denied. The latter operates by framing discussions of non- heterosexual orientations as pathological or abnormal.

Systematic exclusion

Systematic exclusion of people with minority sexual orientations in the larger culture is reflected in our political and legal processes that serve to perpetuate inequality and hostility toward people with minority sexual orientations and deny them their civil rights. Dworkin and Yi (2003) examined data gathered during 1999 to 2000 from organizations that monitor anti-gay violence in the United States. The data revealed that, while bias related murders have decreased in the United States, harassment and intimidation has increased. Reports of police misconduct and abuse have also increased as well as a continuation of encouraging victims of anti gay violence to keep silent. An emerging trend discovered in this data is the increase of heterosexual victims of anti-gay violence and harassment.

Laws that criminalize consensual same sex sodomy (Lugg, 2006) and ballot measures against homosexual marriage (Henning-Stout, et. al, 2000) serve as exclusionary tactics to marginalize people with non-heterosexual orientations. Since 1995, 33 states have enacted state statutes that prohibit marriage equality for same sex couples. Ten states, most recently California and Arizona, have amended their constitutions to outright ban marriage equality for these couples (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, NGLTF, 2008a).

Laws in several states also restrict individuals and couples with minority sexual orientations from adopting or fostering children. Florida has prohibited them from adopting since 1977. Most recently, Arkansas passed a law that went into effect on February 1, 2009 that prohibits people with minority sexual orientations from adopting. Nebraska, Michigan, Mississippi, and Utah are the other states with laws prohibiting such

adoptions. (NGLTF, 2008b). Additionally, Nebraska, Utah, and Arkansas have laws that prohibit the placing of foster children with them (NGLTF, 2008c).

People with minority sexual orientations are also excluded from receiving equal protection. Only thirteen of our fifty states (California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin) and the District of Columbia include sexual orientation in their civil rights laws (Buckel, 2000; Lugg, 2006). Further, 19 states do not include crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity in their hate crime laws (NGLTF, 2008d).

Mirroring the larger culture, systematic exclusion of students with minority sexual orientations is perpetuated across several levels in the school environment. The mandated abstinence only sexual education curriculum found in many schools is biased against students with minority sexual orientations. In these types of curriculum, heterosexual marriage is the only type of union that is promoted as socially acceptable and issues of dating and sexuality pertaining to these students are ignored or equated with immoral, illegal behavior. Ballot measures and bans on marriage equality for adult same-sex couples in the larger culture, coupled with an abstinence only education programs in the school environment, amounts to culturally sanctioned discrimination students with minority sexual orientations (Elia, 2003; Vergari, 2000; Yakush, 2007).

At the academic level, the general curriculum ignores the historic and contemporary roles and contributions of people with minority sexual orientations to United States culture (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000; Robinson, 1994) and denies all students the opportunity to learn about them. Of 6,000 students with minority

sexual orientations participating in a nationwide survey, 87% reported they were not taught about people with, or events and history pertaining to, minority sexual orientations (Kosciw, et al., 2008). Often efforts to include their contributions, issues, and family structures into the curriculum are successfully blocked by citizen groups, rallied by a belief in a "homosexual agenda" that threatens their ideas about what constitutes an ideal family (Rofes, 1997). Further, schools in Alabama, Arizona, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and Utah are specifically prohibited from positively portraying people with minority sexual orientations to students (GLSEN, 2004).

At the social and personal levels, heterosexuality as the cultural norm is promoted at school through such practices as proms that exclude student same sex couples. Heterosexual students are free to talk openly about romantic interests and dating with friends or teachers. Further, physical contact between heterosexual student couples in the hallways is allowed and encouraged. Heterosexuality is also promoted by the ability of heterosexual teachers and other staff to talk freely about their family relationships and openly display photographs of their husbands, wives, and other family members (Macgillivray, 2000).

There is also a lack of visible leaders with minority sexual orientations in public positions in schools. For example, out of 123 school districts examined by Wald, Rienzo, and Button (2002), only 46 reported having openly gay or lesbian teachers and only 10 reported having a representative with a minority sexual orientation on their school boards. Visibility management for adults with minority sexual orientations employed in the school setting remains a critical issue given that job loss or other forms of

discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are daily realities in the culture (Buckel, 2000; Wald et. al, 2002).

In terms of providing protection for students with minority sexual orientations from violence and harassment, schools mirror the larger culture in that they are lacking in policies that support protective measures based on sexual orientation. Russo (2006) created an Anti-Homophobia Taxonomy (APT) and evaluated all 50 United States education policies on civil rights protections for students with minority sexual orientations. Results revealed that 40 out of 50 were not compliant with any of the APT categories. These categories include a sexual orientation non discrimination policy; a non discriminatory code of conduct that includes a format for reporting, investigating and following up on complaints; information provided in libraries for gay and lesbian adolescents; gay and lesbian information in the curriculum; training for school personnel on issues related to sexual orientation; a support group for students with minority sexual orientations; and access to appropriate health education and care for students with minority orientations. There was only one state, Massachusetts, which was compliant with all of the APT categories. Connecticut and Rhode Island were compliant in five categories; California, Minnesota, and New Jersey were compliant in four categories; the District of Columbia, Washington, and Wisconsin were compliant in three categories; Pennsylvania was compliant in two categories and Vermont was compliant in nearly three categories (Russo, 2006).

Systematic inclusion.

While attitudes about minority sexual orientations have generally improved, societal homophobia persists and statements reflecting heterosexual bias continue to be

expressed freely. Hicks and Lee (2006) conducted a comprehensive review of United States Gallup Polls that were conducted between 1970 and 2003 on attitudes toward homosexuality. Their research found that public attitudes toward homosexuality began to improve in the 1990's. Explanations for this positive trend includes the advancement of civil rights for minority groups, lessening religiosity in the larger culture, increased visibility of people with minority sexual orientations, increased belief that sexual orientation is innate, and an increase in acceptance of differences.

Hicks and Lee (2006) also analyzed data of 3,000 respondents from a nationwide election study to identify predictors of bias toward people with minority sexual orientations. The results indicated that women were less biased toward them than men were. Young adults regardless of gender were less biased than older adults. People who were more educated, less religious, pro choice, supportive of gender equity, supportive of aid for racial minorities, and who supported the Democratic Party were also less biased about minority sexual orientations.

The strongest predictor of acceptance of inequalities in society based on sexual orientation is right wing political conservatism. In a review of the literature on systems justification theory spanning ten years, Jost, Banaji, and Nosek (2004) discovered that for heterosexual respondents, right wing political conservatism was consistently associated with justification of social inequalities for people with minority sexual orientations. Citizen groups who are so politically inclined frame their resistance to civil rights based on sexual orientation in terms of immorality (Roffman, 2000; Macgillivary, 2000). Their resistance is rooted in stereotypes, myths, and homophobia and any discussion of sexuality in the larger culture remains, for them, taboo (Jeltova & Fish, 2005). Efforts by

advocacy groups and individuals to dispel myths and dismantle stereotyped notions about non-heterosexual orientations are challenged by these groups as attempts to promote a homosexual agenda (Rofes, 1997).

Systematic inclusion of people with minority sexual orientations found in the larger culture is reproduced in the school environment through the lack of a uniform, or any, response against verbal and physical harassment of students with minority sexual orientations. This implies that having a minority sexual orientation is something that is undesirable (Holmes & Chahill, 2004). Parents of heterosexual students who are politically and religiously conservative are often concerned that supporting students with minority sexual orientations at school is, by design, an effort to usurp their right to teach their children that any sexual orientation other than heterosexual is wrong (Macgillivaray, 2004). Discussions of issues related to minority sexual orientations at school are likely to invoke consternation among conservative students and their parents, propelling them to organize powerful lobbies that are able to influence local school policies through systematic inclusion.

Common among tactics geared toward systematic inclusion such groups utilize to perpetuate inequalities in the school environment for non-heterosexual students, as well as block efforts to support them, is using their interpretation of the Bible as the ultimate moral authority. Regarding sexual orientation, they interpret the Bible as viewing homosexuality as an abomination thereby immoral (Birden, Gaither, & Laird, 2000). They also cite sodomy laws (Lugg, 2006) as justification for systematic inclusion, claiming that such consensual sexual activity is illegal. Often they assert that it is their right as parents to ensure that issues regarding sexuality should be left up to them to teach

(Elia, 2003; Macgillivaray, 2004). The assertion behind these tactics is that heterosexuality is normal, natural and moral while all other sexual orientations are abnormal, dangerous, unnatural, and immoral and it is their right to teach this to their children (Buckel, 2000; Friend, 1993).

Perpetuation of inequalities for students with minority sexual orientations

Efforts by conservative parent groups or other conservative lobbies to block activities that promote and support students with minority sexual orientations are often successful because educational policy is formed and enforced at the state and local levels (Birden, Gaither, & Laird, 2000; Wald et al., 2002). Elected members of a community who serve to represent the community's beliefs and values govern school districts. These elected officials strive to incorporate their community's beliefs and values into what students should know and be able to do (Center for Public Education, 2004; National School Board Association 2006). By design, they support the status quo of the voters in the communities they serve.

Often School Boards respond more to local popular opinion rather than state or national trends before instituting system changes (Button, Rienzo, & Wald, 1997). Equality for people with minority sexual orientations is one of the most critical political issues in the United States' public education system (Lugg, 2003). As such, some groups will successfully pressure school boards to take sides on the issue. Many school boards will avoid initiating supportive programs for these students for fear of retribution from parent groups, school administrators, other teachers and students (Macgillivray, 2000) or in order to avoid offending a particular faith community (Roffman, 2000). This suggests that school systems are significantly influenced by the social and political systems of the

communities in which they are located (Jeltova & Fish, 2005) and school administrators are expected to enforce the community's ideas of sexual orientation on the staff and students (Lugg, 2006).

School boards are generally politically conservative. Hess (2002) presented a profile of 827 school boards located throughout the United States. Findings revealed that school boards are less racially diverse that the United States as a whole but more ethnically diverse that most other state or national elected bodies. Members were over 85% white, more than half were male, and were at higher income and educational levels that the general public. Members were conservative more than two times to one and overall were less liberal than the general population they served. In another study of school boards, Wald, et al. 2002 found that only 10 of 123 school boards examined reported having school board members or candidates for the school board that had a minority sexual orientation.

Based on this literature review, one may surmise that areas of the United States with a political and religious climate that is predominantly conservative are less likely to have civil rights laws and educational policies that include protections for people with minority sexual orientations. These areas are more likely to have opposition groups that are able to influence local political and social structures so that systematic exclusion and inclusion minority sexual orientations continues (Henning-Stout, et. al, 2000; Macgillivray, 2004; Mayo, 2004; Roffman, 2000). School systems in these areas may be indifferent to the needs of students with minority sexual orientations (Stone, 2003) and fail to protect them. They are also unlikely to provide positive minority oriented role models for all students (McFarland, 1998) and are likely to remain silent about the

challenges of students with minority sexual orientations (Russell, 2002). School counselors practicing in such school environments may be vulnerable to unethical behavior if they are unwilling or unable to question school and community policies that harm these students (Davis, Williamson, & Lambie, 2005).

The School Experience of Students with Minority Sexual Orientations

Most research into the school experience of students with minority sexual orientations involves adolescent middle and high school students because it is during adolescence that boys and girls begin to realize their sexuality (Baruth & Manning, 2003). Regarding adolescents with non-heterosexual orientations, while there is a feeling of being different or an awareness of same sex attraction as early as ages four, six and ten (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2007; D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hersberger, 2002; Telljohann & Price, 1993), the average age of coming out as a person with a minority sexual orientation is between age 15 and 17 (D'Augelli et al., 2002; D'Augelli et al., 2007).

In general, the central developmental tasks of American adolescents is the formation of an identity (Erickson, 1969; Marcia, 1980), peer acceptance and increased independence from parental authority (Jessor, 1992), reconciliation of issues related to sexuality, (Mallet, Apostolidis, & Paty, 1997), and the development of a positive self esteem (Diehl, Vicary, & Deike, 1997). Inherent to the achievement of these tasks is a heightened level of emotional arousal and sensation seeking (Erickson, 1969; Marcia, 1980). As a result, all adolescents are at risk for sexual activity, teenage pregnancy, experimentation with drugs and alcohol, depression and suicide.

For the adolescent with a minority sexual orientation, however, these risks are more pronounced because of the social stigma of their sexual orientation in the school, home, and community environments (D'Augelli, et. al, 2002; McFarland, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1994). While there are minority oriented youth who have support at home, in their communities, and at school, most face the challenges of their development with little or no support in any of these settings (Macgillivray, 2000). Given that school attendance in the United States is compulsory, students with minority orientations are particularly vulnerable to verbal harassment and physical assault for the better part of every day they attend (D'Augelli, et. al, 2002; Elia, 1994). A review of the literature regarding the experience of these students in United States schools provides insight into the often hostile environment they must navigate on an hour by hour, day by day, week by week basis.

In a recent nationwide middle and high school student survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, or GLSEN, (Kosciw, et al., 2008), 86% of over 6,000 students with minority sexual orientations participating in the survey reported they had been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted at school year because of their perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender expression. Ninety percent of the respondents reported frequently hearing other students make homophobic or anti-gay remarks. They were also three times more likely to feel unsafe at school and five times more likely to have skipped school due to feeling unsafe than were their heterosexual counterparts. These hostile conditions are likely to have a detrimental impact on their academic achievement. Over 40% of the respondents in this study had no plans for continued education beyond high school (Kosciw, et al., 2008).

Other large-scale studies support that victimization at school is disproportionately associated with a minority sexual orientation. Because of victimization, students with minority sexual orientations surveyed report higher levels of substance abuse, suicidality, and sexual risk behaviors (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002). They also report higher levels of mental health symptoms, including trauma symptoms and posttraumatic stress diagnosis (D'Augelli et al., 2007), and higher levels of hyper vigilance and fear (D'Augelli et al., 2002). Further, these students often internalize homophobic remarks frequently expressed by their peers, teachers, and other school staff. This internalization often results in feelings of worthlessness that leads to self-imposed isolation (Hetrik & Martin, 1987). These students report that this sense of isolation is intensified due to the heterosexually oriented social atmosphere of schools (Omizo, Omizo, & Okamoto, 1998) which reinforced their reported lowered sense of school belonging. (Galliher, Rostosky, & Hughes, 2004; Poteat & Espelage, 2007).

Many students with minority sexual orientations cope with the hostility in their school environment by remaining invisible or closeted throughout their school years (Sears, 1992). Invisibility management involves skillful, constant management of behavior when interacting with others (Gonsiorek, 1988; Elia, 1994) and fear of the consequences of discovery is a constant theme in the literature. Physical and emotional victimization of these students is a clear and present danger. Participants have reported verbal abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse due to their sexual orientation beginning as early as the age of six (D'Augelli et al., 2007; D'Augelli et al. 2002). Participants report consistently that they are often fearful of losing friends and being ostracized and humiliated by their teachers if their sexual orientation is discovered (Hetrick & Martin,

1987; Muyoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Poteat & Espelage, 2007). It is reasonable to suggest that these conditions contribute to students with minority sexual orientations being at higher risk of dropping out of school than are their heterosexual counterparts (Remafedi, 1990; Savin-Williams, 1994).

Students with minority sexual orientations who participated in research have described the type of support they have received in the school environment from their counselors, teachers and other the school staff. The amount of research in this area is sparse but nonetheless telling. These students report a pervasive sense of isolation and many report the lack of visible adult and peer allies in the environment to which they can turn to talk about issues related to their sexual orientation (Kosciw, et al., 2008; Omizo et al. 1998; Tellhjohann & Price, 1993). Some felt judged by their school counselors due to the counselor's reaction of shock and disbelief when their non-heterosexual orientation was disclosed (Rutter & Leech, 2006).

In other studies, when teachers were perceived as fair, students with minority sexual orientations reported more positive feelings about school, less school difficulties, and higher grade point averages than their counterparts who perceived teachers as unfair (Muyoz-Plaza, et al. 2002; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). More positive school environments and supportive teachers, counselors, and other school staff also contributes to an overall feeling of safety at school. However, support from school staff did not contribute to a feeling of equal integration into the social aspects of the school environment (Elze, 2003). Others described their school environments as being totally void of any recognition or mention of a sexual orientation other than heterosexual (Sears, 1991) and many reported feelings of not belonging at all in school (Galliher et al., 2004)

Homophobic remarks, the most common form of harassment, are consistently reported as being generally ignored by school staff (Kosciw, et al., 2008; Rutter & Leech, 2006; Sears, 1991; Telljohann & Price, 1993; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005). Refusing to address such remarks may imply to heterosexual students that this behavior is acceptable and offer evidence to students with minority sexual orientations that school counselors and other staff are not safe or trustworthy. This perceived lack of visible support in the school environment suggests that school counselors who are advocates for these students are failing to make it known (Telljohnann & Price, 1993; Williams, et al., 2005). Verbal harassment has the potential to escalate into violence (ACLU, 2007a; Allport, 1954). Refusing to intervene or ignoring homophobic remarks potentially makes school counselors culpable when physical violence against students with minority sexual orientations occurs.

It appears that while school staff is unwilling or ill equipped to challenge the status quo of a heterosexist or at worst homophobic school culture (Elia, 2003; Friend, 1993), others are not. Parents of students with minority orientations, activists, and even students themselves are beginning to resist heterosexism and homophobia by demanding an equal and level personal, social, and academic playing field in the school setting (Buckel, 2000; Jeltova & Fish, 2005). Parents and gay rights activists have initiated several lawsuits over the past decade in order to force school systems to abide by their constitutional obligation to protect students from verbal and physical harassment based on sexual orientation. Cases such as Nabonzy vs. Podlesny (Lambda, 1996), Theno vs. Tonganoxie Unified School District, Ramelli and Donovan vs. Poway Unified School District, L. W. ex rel. L. G. vs. Tom River Regional Schools Board of Education, and

Rothmeyer vs. Perry Community School District (ACLU, 2007a) have been litigated over the past ten years. As a result, damages in excess of millions of dollars have been awarded to the plaintiffs because of school officials' unwillingness or inability to protect students from anti-gay verbal harassment and physical assaults.

This review of the literature regarding the school experience of students with minority sexual orientations illustrates the clear, present, and immediate need for advocates for them in the school environment. School counselors are perhaps in the most advantageous position to advocate for these students because they provide direct services to students and are able to network with students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community stakeholders (Field & Baker, 2004; Stone, 2003). Further, as per the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), school counselors are ethically bound, for example, to consider the impact that a hostile school environment has on the academic, social, personal, and career development of students with minority sexual orientations plus identify and address barriers to their inclusion and acceptance in the school environment (ASCA, 2007a).

ASCA's Position on Students with Minority Sexual Orientations

Advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations is an integral role of the professional school counselor. From the preamble throughout, the ethical standards of ASCA explicitly outlines the obligation of school counselors to advocate for and affirm all students from diverse populations. Section E2 paragraphs a through d contains standards for school counselors describing self-responsibilities regarding students from diverse backgrounds. These standards include: a) affirming the diversity of students, staff and families; b) developing and expanding an awareness of cultural values and biases

while striving to attain multicultural competence; c) acquiring knowledge and understanding of the personal and professional impact of oppression, racism, discrimination, and stereotyping; and d) acquiring continued education and experience to improve the effectiveness of interventions on behalf of students from diverse populations (ASCA, 2004).

Ethical standards regarding school counselor responsibilities to the profession (Section F, paragraph d) hold that adherence to the ethical standards, official ASCA position statements, other ASCA statements such as those found in the ASCA National Model, and relevant local, federal and state legal requirements is expected. Further, as stated in Section G, adherence to these standards is expected at all times, and when school counselors doubt their ability to practice according to the ethical standards or are forced to work under circumstances that do not comply with the standards, they are obligated to take the appropriate steps to address these issues (ASCA, 2004).

The ASCA position statement regarding students with minority sexual orientations mandates that school counselors ensure equal access and educational opportunities are available to these students. School counselors are required to address barriers in the school environment that impede the academic, personal, social, and career development of these students. Their cognitive, emotional, and social development is the same as that of heterosexual student development and school counselors are required to provide support that promotes their development and well-being in the school environment. Attempts to change a students' sexual orientation or viewing a non-heterosexual orientation as a disorder or a symptom of an underlying emotional problem are counter to ASCA's position (ASCA, 2007a).

Further delineated in this position statement are dispositions and behaviors that are required to effectively counsel and advocate for students with minority sexual orientations. In addition to being aware of his or her beliefs about sexual orientation, school counselors must be committed to affirming all sexual orientations and engage in activities across multiple school contexts in support of students with minority sexual orientations. For example, in addition to providing individual counseling for students who may be struggling with their feelings associated with their sexual orientation, school counselors also work with students in groups that serve to promote non-judgmental acceptance of non-heterosexual identities. School counselors encourage their administration to include language in school policies that addresses discrimination based on sexual orientation. School counselors are also required to take a leadership role in promoting the awareness of issues related to youth with minority sexual orientations among teachers, parents, administrators, and the larger community (ASCA, 2007a).

No studies were found in the literature related to school counselor awareness of or compliance with the ASCA standards regarding advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations. One study was found that examined how school counselors defined advocacy in general (Field & Baker, 2004). A second study, a dissertation, examined personal belief systems and values that influence school counselor attitudes regarding social justice advocacy for at risk populations (Parikh, 2008). Neither study looked at specific at risk populations.

Field and Baker (2004) conducted a qualitative examination of nine school counselors who were asked a series of questions regarding how and when they advocated on behalf of students. Thematic analysis of the results found that the participants were

more reactive versus proactive and the situations that called for advocacy had been longstanding in the school environment. Specific advocacy behaviors identified by the participants included writing letters, making phone calls, and standing up for students. The results also indicated that the advocacy behaviors utilized by the school counselors focused on attempts to help students cope with existing conditions rather than to effect systemic change. The school counselors who participated in this study reported it was most important to them that they provided a voice for students and accepted them unconditionally. Barriers to advocacy, as reported by the respondents, included being overwhelmed by the volume and variety of responsibilities placed on them by administrators.

Parikh (2008) surveyed 298 school counselors with current membership in ASCA and found that belief in a just world (people get what they deserve and deserve what they get) and self-reported political ideology was statistically significant predictors of the participants' advocacy attitudes as measured by The Social Justice Advocacy Scale (SJAS). Through regression analysis, the results indicated that participants who had lower scores on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS) were more likely to have higher or more positive attitudes towards social justice advocacy. The results further indicated that participants who self reported conservative political views were less likely to have positive attitudes toward social justice advocacy.

Advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations is necessary and required by professional ethical standard; the research that provides evidence of the hostile climate of the school environment toward them demands it. Therefore, research regarding when and how school counselors engage in advocacy behaviors on their behalf must be of

critical concern to school counselor educators, trainers, supervisors, and administrators. The limited findings of the previously mentioned studies indicate that advocacy for at risk populations such as students with minority sexual orientations is influenced by both conditions in the school environment and personal values and beliefs. Therefore, it is important to examine school counselor understanding of, willingness, and ability to adhere to the ASCA guidelines pertaining to these students.

School Counselors' Experience with Students with Minority Sexual Orientations

There were three empirical studies found in the literature specifically related to school counselors' experience, attitudes, and perceptions of counseling students with minority sexual orientations. Sears (1992) surveyed 142 school counselors in a Southern state who completed several instruments related to homosexuality such as the Modified Attitudes Toward Homosexuality survey (MATH), and the Index of Homophobia measure (IH) plus a measure of counselor perceptions of the quality of school life for students with minority sexual orientations created specifically for the study. Results revealed that the participants were generally confused or ambivalent about their feelings regarding minority sexual orientations and the nature of these feelings were described as negative. Further, school counselors in this study described themselves as being ill prepared to work with students with minority sexual orientations. They also expressed a need to be more proactive and supportive of these students but could not be specific about interventions they could or would utilize. The consensus of the participants was that there was little to no evidence that students with minority sexual orientations were supported in their school environment.

Price and Telljohann (1991) conducted a national survey of 289 school counselors regarding their perceptions of adolescents with minority sexual orientations. Twenty percent of the participants did not believe they had been adequately prepared to meet the needs of these students and therefore were not confident in their ability to advocate for them. Further, one in five of the participants revealed that working with students with minority sexual orientations would not be a gratifying experience for them. Twenty five percent of the participants reported teachers and other school staff were homophobic and the school administration would not be in favor of providing supportive services in the school for these students. A third of the participants believed that harassment of these students was a serious problem and there was little to no action by counselors, teachers, and administrators to combat the problem.

Fontaine (1998) surveyed 101 Midwestern school counselors and found that more than half of them reported having worked with students with minority sexual orientations who were struggling with a range of issues from low self esteem, depression, suicidiality, isolation to avoid exposure, to fear of the consequences of exposure such as rejection, humiliation, and physical abuse. School counselors participating in this survey also reported observing a range of harassing behaviors perpetuated against these students in their schools, which included name-calling, teasing, and exclusion to hitting, pushing, and shoving. The participants reported that the overall attitude toward these students held by students, faculty, and administrative staff at their schools was negative or intolerant. This study did not address how the participants responded to the needs of their student clients with minority sexual orientations or the hostile climate of the school environment.

The participants reported having more favorable views toward these students than other school staff and agreed they were ethically mandated to address their needs.

Only two percent of the participants in Fontaine's study (1998) reported participating in training regarding the needs of students with minority sexual orientations while 11% reported they were not interested in such training. Qualitative data on the survey revealed that the primary source of information regarding the needs of these students came from professional journals or the mass media rather than from counselor education or continued education programs. Qualitative data also revealed that some participants were reluctant to address the needs of these students due to religious or moral objections to homosexuality while others were reluctant to address the students' needs for fear of backlash from administration or socially conservative parents.

The results of these studies indicate that while the school counseling profession formally expresses and affirms people with minority sexual orientations via ethical mandates and standards of practice, there is evidence that external and internal conditions create powerful barriers toward doing so (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001). While there is a dearth of empirical studies regarding school counselor attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about working with sexual these students and no studies regarding how school counselors specifically advocate for them, there is an abundance of conceptual and theoretical articles related to school counselor advocacy for this student population.

Conceptual writings have presented school counselors with a number of strategies designed to promote ASCA standards regarding advocacy on behalf of students with minority sexual orientations. These strategies range from becoming aware of one's own homophobia and heterosexual bias (Cooley, 1998) to continued education regarding

minority sexual orientation identity development and the coming out process (Nichols, 1999). Other strategies include forming coalitions with supportive individuals, organizations, or groups to address harassment and homophobia (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000), and creating an affirming environment that presents positive images of people with minority sexual orientations (Jeltova & Fish, 2005).

Additional strategies designed to promote ASCA standards include becoming aware of the political and social forces that affect a school counselor's work with students with minority sexual orientations (DiSilvestro, 1980). Using inclusive language, challenging homophobic remarks uttered by students and others (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001) and advocating for inclusion of sexual orientation in anti discrimination, and bullying policies (Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001) are also promoted in the literature. Starting a support group such as a GSA is one of the most effective strategies to combat hostility in the school environment towards students with minority sexual orientations (Robinson, 1994). All of these strategies are consistent with ASCA standards that require school counselors to acquire educational, consultation and training experiences to enhance their awareness, knowledge, skills related to these students' issues. Engaging in these strategies will also improve their effectiveness at promoting and creating school environments that are free of violence, fear, bullying and hostility towards students with minority sexual orientations (ASCA, 2007).

It is critical that school counselors actively advocate for students with minority sexual orientations because they may very well be the only adults in the school environment that can address their needs across school contexts. It is also likely that a school counselor is only adult these students are able to confide in regarding issues

related to their sexual orientation (Cooley, 1998). However, based on the limited empirical knowledge presented, school counselors in general are not doing enough to address the needs of these students and/or are unsure of their ability to address their needs. Research into the overall school environment as it relates to the experience of these students indicates that the largest and most insidious barrier to advocacy for them is the pervasive and persistent negative view of homosexuality in the larger culture. Many school counselors may be reluctant to or ill prepared to challenge inequitable and hostile conditions due to the level of homophobia in the school environment and community at large.

Gay-Straight Alliance Clubs

Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are student-led, school based clubs open to all students regardless of sexual orientation. GSAs advocate for improved school climate, provide education to the school community about issues related to students with minority sexual orientation, and provide a supportive network for these students and their allies (GLSEN, 2007). Social support is a primary focus of GSAs due to the feelings of isolation that are associated with depression and high risk behaviors among students with minority sexual orientations (Hetrik & Martin, 1987; McFarland, 1998). Described as the most prevalent or primary, student friendly method of providing supportive services (Mayo, 2004; Sever, 2006), GSAs are designed to promote the integration of these students into a supportive peer group while diminishing feelings of alienation and enhancing self esteem (Williams, Connelly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005). Currently there are 3,500 GSAs across the United States that are registered with GLSEN.

Empirical support for GSAs

There is a limited but growing body of research emerging that supports GSAs are achieving the goals of their philosophical underpinnings regarding safety, education, and support. One of the first school-based programs for students with minority sexual orientations was created in 1984 in Los Angeles, California. Called Project 10, the program was formed in response to the disproportionate number of students with minority sexual orientations in this district that had attempted suicide, abused drugs and alcohol, engaged in risky sexual relations, or dropped out of school. One of the most successful components of Project 10 was its support groups for the students that focused on affirming their sexual orientations and building self-esteem (Uribe & Harbeck, 1991).

Fifty (13 females and 37 males who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual) who participated in the support group between 1984 and 1987 were interviewed over the course of several months about their school experiences. They reported improved academic performance and school attendance, improved relationships with family, peers, and an increase in feelings of school belonging (Uribe & Harbeck, 1991). Heterosexual students surveyed about the appropriateness of having a program such as Project 10 in their school indicated that 61% (of 342) agreed that the program was needed and that sexual orientation was an appropriate topic of conversation. Fifty-six percent reported knowing a classmate who identified as having a minority sexual orientation and 79% reported that Project 10 was beneficial because it was a safe place for all students and provided accurate information about sexual orientation and related issues. Fifty percent believed that Project 10 had a positive effect on the overall climate of the school while

38% were undecided about its impact. The remaining respondents, 11%, felt the presence of Project 10 had a negative impact on their school (Uribe & Harbeck, 1991).

Lee (2002) conducted a qualitative examination of the seven students with minority sexual orientations who pioneered the first GSA in Utah. The community erupted in controversy when the GSA was formed and conservative citizen groups lobbied the school board to have the club banned. The students, along with supportive family members, school staff, and gay rights activists resisted the opposition's efforts to ban the club. The students reported that because of having experienced the controversy over the formation of the club, they felt empowered and more connected to their school and community. They also reported an improvement in their grades improved and a sense of accomplishment for challenging the heterosexism and homophobia in their school and community.

Szalacha (2003) examined students' perceptions of safety in 33 schools across the state of Massachusetts. Using the recommendations from the Massachusetts Safe Schools Program (an established school harassment policy that included sexual orientation, professional training for school staff, and a GSA), 1,646 students were surveyed about their knowledge of these recommendations and the impact they may have had on their school's climate toward students with minority sexual orientations. Of them, 113 identified as having a non-heterosexual orientation. Of the schools participating in the study, 36% had not implemented any of the three recommendations, 9% had established GSA but had not implemented professional training nor did their anti harassment policy include sexual orientation, 12% had GSAs and professional training for staff, and the remaining 12% had incorporated all three of the recommendations.

The results indicated that the presence of a GSA was the strongest of the three recommendations in terms of the participants' positive perceptions of a safe school environment for students with a minority sexual orientation. In schools without GSAs, 75% of the participants reported hearing homophobic remarks daily while 57% of the participants in schools with GSAs reported hearing these remarks daily. In the schools with GSAs, participants were two times more likely to hear school staff intervene or make positive remarks about minority sexual orientations than in schools without GSAs. Support from teachers, counselors, and administrators were also more visible in schools with GSAs (52%) as compared to schools without GSAs (37%). Regarding school counselors, 64% of the participants in schools with GSAs reported they felt comfortable referring a fellow student struggling with issues related to sexual orientation to their school counselor whereas 44% in schools without GSAs felt comfortable doing so (Szalacha, 2003).

Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer (2006) examined data from 202 students with minority sexual orientations from 52 schools in Massachusetts who had participated in a youth risk behavior survey. They matched this data and school principal reports regarding school policies and programs related to school safety for students with minority sexual orientations. They compared both data sets with data from students with minority sexual orientations in schools with and without GSAs. Results from their data analysis revealed that participants in schools with GSAs were less than half as likely as those in schools without them to report victimization by dates, being injured or threatened with violence at school, or skipping school out of fear of harassment or victimization.

Participants in schools with GSAs were also one third less likely to have made a suicide attempt.

Kosciw and Diaz (2006) found that 47% of 1,732 students with minority sexual orientations responding to a national survey reported that their school had a GSA. Of these participants, 66.3% participated in GSA activities consistently and half perceived the school principal as being supportive of the club. Sixty one percent of survey respondents who attended schools with a GSA were less likely to report feeling unsafe at school in comparison to 68% of the respondents attending schools without a GSA who were more likely to feel unsafe at school. Of students in schools with GSAs, 26% skipped school due to feeling unsafe in comparison with 32% of students in schools without GSA skipping school due to feeling unsafe.

Kosciw and Diaz (2006) also found that 84% of respondents with minority sexual orientations attending schools with a GSA are significantly more aware of supportive staff in the school environment than those who attend schools without a GSA. In schools without a GSA, 56% of the respondents reported being aware of a supportive staff member to which they could talk to about their needs. Respondents in schools with a GSA also reported a higher sense of school belonging on (2.78 on a four point scale) than respondents in schools without a GSA (2.67).

Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer (2004) conducted interviews with GSA advisors, principals, counselors, teachers, and parents in 22 schools in Massachusetts to examine the role GSAs play in creating systemic change that supports students with minority sexual orientations. In two of the schools examined, counseling and support were the primary role that the GSA played. The advisors were school counselors who did not

believe the administration, other school staff, or larger community supported the GSA. Because of the perceived lack of support, advisors limited their roles to addressing the clinical issues of student members and did not attempt to include the overall school environment or larger community in activities or discussions regarding issues related to sexual orientation. The GSA members at these two schools also perceived that the school environment was hostile to them and therefore the group meetings focused primarily on identity issues and depression related to feelings of isolation.

The role of GSAs in six of the schools was to provide a safe space for students with minority sexual orientations to socialize (Griffin, et al., 2004). The GSAs in these schools were promoted campus wide through posters and public service announcements. The activities of the GSAs included having guest speakers, watching movies with minority orientations themes, and organizing participation in community events such as pride marches and rallies. The advisors were openly gay or lesbian teachers who stated the purpose of the groups was geared primarily toward social support. The advisors of the GSA at five of the six schools reported they had support from the administration while the advisor at one of them did not.

In nine of the study's schools, GSAs functioned primarily as a way to raise awareness, increase visibility, and provide education to the entire student body and school community regarding issues related to sexual orientation in the school environment (Griffin, et al., 2004). Some of the activities the GSAs initiated in these schools included lobbying for staff training on sexual orientation issues and planning school wide assemblies about them. GSA members visited classrooms to talk about student rights and one GSA obtained a grant to purchase books that included minority

sexual orientation representation for the library. GSAs in these schools were highly visible and consistently promoted as a vehicle for inclusion of students with minority sexual orientations in the day-to-day school experience.

The remaining five schools in the study had GSAs that were one part of a broader school effort to raise awareness and make the school environment safe for students with minority sexual orientations (Griffin, et al., 2004). In other words, while GSAs in these schools were active and visible, they were not the primary means of support for these students. In these schools, task forces comprised of staff, parents, and students met regularly and independently of the GSA to ensure the implementation of initiatives designed to address hostility in the schools. In addition, the principals of these schools implemented mandated training for school staff regarding issues affecting students with minority sexual orientations.

Griffin, et al. (2004) illustrate in their study that the while the presence of a GSA in school is beneficial in terms of impacting individual behavior and increasing individual awareness, the larger issue is how the presence of a GSA contributes to significant and lasting systemic changes. Goodenow, et al. (2006) suggests longitudinal studies exploring how GSAs influence school culture over time would increase our understanding of their role in institutional change. However until such studies can be initiated, the current empirical but limited literature supports that the presence of a GSA is associated with a decrease in verbal and physical harassment, an increased visibility of supportive school staff, and an increased sense of school belonging (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Goodenow, et al., 2006; Szalacha, 2003; Uribe & Harbeck, 1991).

Opposition to GSAs

Controversy over social support for, and affirmation of, students with minority sexual orientations in the school environment often polarizes the school community (Mayo, 2004). Nowhere is this more evident than when students attempt to form a GSA (ACLU, 2003a; Macgillvaray, 2004; Russell, 2002; Szalacha, 2003). Opposition groups often organize and attempt to rally local school boards to block GSAs from schools. The primary tactics used range from questioning their legality on the basis of sodomy laws (Lugg, 2006), withholding political support to school board members (Macgillivray, 2000), supporting religiously conservative school board candidates (Wald, et al. 2002), abstinence only sex education (Yakush, 2007), to demanding that all non curricular clubs disband if a GSA is pursued (ACLU, 2003a). These tactics have been successful and, in some cases, students, parents, and gay rights activists have engaged the legal system to procure the students' civil right to form a club and meet on school property as decreed by the Equal Access Act.

There have been numerous documented incidents regarding opposition against the formation of a GSA in schools throughout the United States. The ACLU and Lambda are national organization that advocate for full recognition of the civil rights of people with minority sexual orientations that have been an invaluable resource for students who have had their attempts to start a GSA blocked by school boards. A search of press releases on the Lambda and ACLU web sites reveal that a number of lawsuits have been filed and, in most cases, won when such instances occur.

In 1995, the Salt Lake City Utah school board voted to ban all non-curricular clubs to block a GSA from forming at East High School after controversy over the club

erupted in the community. Parents and students who were opposed to the GSA and local religious leaders persuaded the school board to reject the formation of the GSA. Lambda filed a lawsuit arguing the school board's decision violated the students' First Amendment Right to freedom of expression and the Equal Access Act. The court agreed and five years after the students' request to form a GSA, the school board overturned their ban on all student clubs and the GSA, allowing the GSA to form (Lambda, 2000).

Lambda filed a lawsuit in 1999 on behalf of the El Modena High School GSA in Orange County, California due to a GSA not being treated the same as other recognized student clubs at their school. The GSA was not allowed to meet and, after several requests were made by the students to do so, the Orange Unified School Board, at the urging of parents and religious leaders opposed to the GSA, formally and unanimously voted to deny the students their legal rights to meet at the school. An injunction against the school district in 2000 allowed the GSA to meet pending a decision on the lawsuit. Ultimately, the lawsuit was settled out of court and the GSA was formally recognized and had equitable access to the school's resources (Lambda, 2000).

When a student attempted in September 2002 to form a GSA at Klein High School in Klein, Texas, school officials changed the rules governing non-curricular clubs in an effort to appease parents and religious leaders who were opposed to the GSA. The GSA application was amended and resubmitted and several months later, the application for the GSA was not approved. The student's father went before the school board to determine the delay. Unsatisfied, the ACLU filed a lawsuit on the student's behalf, asserting that the Klein Independent School District was discriminating against the students. The lawsuit was dropped a year after the GSA was requested when school

officials agreed to recognize the club and grant the club equal access to school resources (ACLU, 2003b).

In December 2002, the Boyd County Board of Education in Kentucky suspended all clubs in all schools in the district in an attempt to block a group of students from forming a GSA at Boyd County High School. The ACLU filed a lawsuit on behalf of the students. In February 2004, a settlement was reached giving the GSA full and equal access to the school's resources. Due to the high level of homophobia observed in students, parents and others who had opposed the GSA, the settlement also required the school district to conduct anti-harassment training for all district staff as well as all students in high school and middle school (ACLU, 2004).

In 2003, the ACLU filed a lawsuit against the Colorado Springs School District No. 11 when it refused to recognize the Palmer High School GSA. As a result, the members of the GSA could not meet on school property, could not post club information on school bulletin boards, could not use the public address system to make announcements, and was not included the school's yearbook or on its official list of student-organized activities, essentially banning them from equal access. After the lawsuit was filed, the school board created a tier system for clubs stating that clubs related to the curriculum would have full privileges while non-curricular clubs could not, naming such clubs "Independent Student Groups." The lawsuit was settled when the school district agreed to suspend the tier system, thus providing equal treatment for the GSA and all other non-curricular clubs (ACLU, 2005).

A similar incident occurred at the Puyallup High School in Bethel, Washington. The GSA at Puyallup was allowed to meet on campus but was not allowed access to the

school's resources. The Associated Student Body voted not to recognize the club and without approval from this group, the GSA could not be granted official status. The students contacted the ACLU who informed the principal that the school was in violation of the Equal Access Act. The principal allowed the GSA to meet with full access and a lawsuit was avoided (ACLU, 2003c).

Students at Lubbock High School in Texas faced similar obstacles in 2003 when the Lubbock Independent School District formally denied a request to start a GSA (Lambda, 2003). A lawsuit was filed on the basis that the school board was in violation of the Equal Access Act by banning the GSA. The case was settled out of court and the students were allowed to form the GSA and were granted equal access to all school resources.

In February 2005, students at White County High School in Cleveland, Georgia sought assistance from the ACLU when their application to start a GSA went unanswered. A few days after school administrators were contacted by the ACLU to inform them that the Equal Access Act covers GSAs, the White County School Board announced plans to ban all non-curricular clubs for the remainder of the academic school year because of pressure from parents and religious leaders who opposed the GSA. Finally, in 2007, the case was settled out of court and the student members of the GSA were allowed to meet on school campus (ACLU, 2007c).

In September 2006, a student at Okeechobee High School in Florida applied to start a GSA. School officials banned the club from forming, stating that the GSA violated the school's abstinence only teaching policy. Parents and religious leaders raised the concern that sexual discussions could possibly take place during GSA meeting, therefore

the GSA should not be allowed. A district court decision in Franuary of 2007 ordered Okeechobee High School to officially recognize and allow equal access to the GSA (ACLU, 2007d). Then, in October 2007, the Okeechobee School District again banned the GSA after voting to change its rules regarding non-curricular clubs. The change prohibited sexually oriented clubs and clubs that were based on sexual orientation or grouping. Finally, a district court ruling in August 2008, cleared the way for the GSA to meet on campus and be recognized as a non-curricular student club (Duret, 2008).

After two years of waiting for official recognition from Madera High School, the ACLU was able to negotiate with the Madera Unified School District in California to allow a GSA in the school. The students who applied for a GSA in early spring of 2005 waited six months before being told they could meet on campus. However, school officials stipulated that the GSA would not be recognized as a school sponsored club, meaning that its members could not have access to resources such as make announcements over the public address system, hang posters advertising the club, engage in fundraisers, or other activities. Finally, in March of 2007, after negotiations with ACLU staff, the club was able to meet at the school with full access to resources (ACLU, 2007e).

In 2006, Lambda filed a lawsuit against the superintendent of the Noble Network of Charter Schools in Chicago Illinois for refusing to recognize a GSA in the Noble Street Charter School. The GSA was banned from advertising their club and access to school resources. In June of 2006, a settlement was reached giving the Noble Street GSA equal access to campus facilities, including the ability to advertise their meetings on campus, and other rights afforded to non-curricular clubs (Lambda, 2006).

In 2005, the Osseo School District in Hennepin County, Minnesota refused a request for a GSA at Maple Grove High School. Subsequently, the district was sued by the ACLU for discrimination against the group based on the Equal Access Act. The courts ruled in favor of the GSA in September 2007 and issued a permanent injunction, ordering the school to allow the GSA to exist with full access to resources. The Osseo School District appealed this decision. During the appeal, the GSA will be allowed to meet. No trial date has been set for a hearing on the school board's appeal (ACLU, 2007f)

Other students who have sought to form a GSA in their high school have not benefited from legal intervention from the ACLU or Lambda. Some of these instances were reconciled due to the diligence of school administrators who wanted to remain within the guidelines of the Equal Access Act. For example, in 2000, when two students at McKinley High School in Baton Rouge Louisiana, they were met with angry protests from other students. A group of local clergy began lobbying the school board to ban the club. Ultimately, the GSA was allowed due to school board members' fears of violating the Equal Access Act. However, the school board adopted new guidelines for all non-curricular clubs, including a requirement for parental permission for club participation (Robinson, 2003).

Similarly in Anchorage, Alaska in 1996, students at Diamond High School experienced harassment in the school when they began advertising for members to a newly formed GSA. Reaction was mixed and most of the opposition to the GSA came from parents and religious leaders who were vocal about their belief that homosexuality was immoral. Seeking a compromise, the Anchorage School Board voted to allow the

continuation of all non-curricular clubs, including the GSA but also voted to implement a policy that required parental permission for students to join the GSA. (Robinson, 2003).

Other incidents were resolved in favor of the status quo. Steve Lyttle (2006) of the Charlotte Observer in North Carolina reported that on April 10, 2006 the Rowan-Salisbury School Board in Rowan County voted unanimously to ban all non-curricular clubs in order to prevent a GSA from being formed at East Rowan High School. Operation Save America, a conservative religious organization, vehemently opposed the GSA. Its members picketed the school and spoke against the club during a school board meeting. At a subsequent meeting in August of 2006, the Rowan-Salisbury School Board voted unanimously to approve an amendment to the school's extracurricular activities policy banning sex-based student clubs. The policy used the school system's existing abstinence-only sex education policy as the basis for the ban (Burchette, 2006).

It is clear from these reports that the formation of a GSA in several areas of the United States created significant controversy. It is also likely that in some schools students with minority sexual orientations and their allies may not feel supported or safe enough to approach school personnel about starting a GSA or their requests are ignored long enough that the students and sponsoring staff give up (Robinson, 2003). There is ample evidence that community opposition to GSAs is often successful in denying students with minority sexual orientations their civil and equal rights. There is no documentation in the literature regarding how school counselors working in these communities perceive and react to a GSA ban. Exploring this experience from their perspective may provide insight into how such critical incidents provide a catalyst for or

remain a barrier to the fulfillment of their ethical obligations and the development of their advocacy competency.

Summary

Decades of research have demonstrated that students who have minority sexual orientations are at a higher risk for depression, suicide, substance abuse, and dropping out of school due to the social stigma of a non- heterosexual orientation. School counselors are ethically obligated to confront this stigma by advocating for supportive services and challenging inequities in the school environment that impede the academic, social, personal, and career development of these students. Ideally, their efforts are aimed at school system reform that includes policies that protect these students from verbal and physical harassment and developing programs that provide support for them.

Research into school counselors' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about students with minority sexual orientations indicate that internal barriers such as a lack of confidence in their ability or feeling inadequately prepared are significant barriers advocacy for these students. Significant external barriers to advocacy include lack of support for advocacy initiatives on the part of school administrators. Further, the best intentions of a school counselor or other school staff to follow ethical guidelines may be thwarted by administrators intimidated by or in collusion with community opposition.

There is an abundance of conceptual articles outlining specific advocacy behaviors for students with minority sexual orientations but no research regarding how these behaviors evolve when circumstances warrant them. One of the most common and visible ways to indicate a school environment is supportive of students with minority sexual orientations is the presence of a GSA. One of the primary functions of a GSA is to

alleviate the sense of isolation experienced by these students at school. Research has shown that belonging to a GSA increases self-esteem, school belonging, and academic interests. Schools with GSAs are safer for students with minority sexual orientations and provide heterosexual students with appropriate information about minority sexual orientations thereby serving to decrease homophobia.

In best practice, GSAs have support from school administrators and the community at large. However, many lack this support and the formation of a GSA is met with opposition. When GSAs are banned, ideally school counselors, based on ASCA standards, are working directly with individuals and groups on multiple levels to advocate for their inclusion.

Civil rights for people with minority sexual orientations is one of the most important ethical issues facing the professional counseling community, a community that is committed to social justice advocacy. Understanding how advocacy competency is developed and manifest by school counselors on behalf of students with minority sexual orientations when their civil rights are denied, as when GSAs are banned, will add to the empirical knowledge and discussion of how school counselors perceive and challenge systemic barriers to educational equity. The current study explored through qualitative methodology how school counselors' perceptions of a ban on a GSA influenced their perceived ability to meet their ethical obligation to advocate for students with minority sexual orientations.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

School, as evidenced in the literature, is often a hostile environment for students with minority sexual orientations. These students are often victims of verbal and physical harassment in the hallways and classrooms (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008; D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2007). Because of victimization and social stigma, these students engage in higher levels of at risk behavior such as substance abuse and dropping out of school (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Remafedi, 1990). Students with minority sexual orientations are also diagnosed with trauma and other mental health diagnoses at disproportionately higher rates than their heterosexual counterparts are (D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hersberger, 2002; D'Augelli et al., 2007).

Students with minority sexual orientations report lower levels of school belonging (Poteat & Espelage, 2007) and lack of visible support from teachers or other school staff to turn for support (Tellhjohann & Price, 1993). These students are clearly an at risk population in need of advocacy. Organizations such as the American Counseling Association the American School Counseling Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the American Psychological Association, the American School Health Association, the Interfaith Alliance Foundation, the National Association of School Psychologists, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of Social Workers, the National Education Association, and the School

Social Work Association of America have created professional standards and ethical mandates for advocacy for these students (Just the Facts Coalition, 2008)

An abundance of conceptual and theoretical articles exist enumerating activities and personal characteristics needed by school counselors to advocate for students with minority sexual orientations. Currently, however, there are no empirical examinations available in the literature regarding how school counselors react to or address discrimination against these students within the school system. Researchers and educators in the field of counseling have urged further research regarding how advocacy competency is developed and what strategies school counselors utilize when faced with systemic barriers to advocacy, such as a GSA ban, within the school environment and the larger community (Field & Baker, 2004; Trusty & Brown, 2005).

Rationale for Using Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research is appropriate when there is a need to present a detailed and in-depth view of a phenomenon that is multifaceted in nature. Purpose statements and research questions regarding such phenomenon are general and broad, framed by "how" or "what" versus "why" (Creswell, 2005). The purpose of this study was to explore how school counselors perceive and describe a GSA ban and how their perceptions and descriptions influence their advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations. This intent is in line with definition of qualitative research as a form of inquiry that explores the behavior, perspectives, and experiences of research participants in order to acquire an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon as it is experienced by them (Patton, 2002). For the purposes of this study, I utilized a phenomenological qualitative methodology.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology as a scientific tradition is most readily associated with German mathematician and existential philosopher Edmund H. Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl believed all of our knowing comes from sensory experience of a phenomenon; that we can only know what we experience. We make meaning of our experiences through the describing, explaining, and interpreting of them, thus awakening our conscious awareness. For Husserl, making meaning of phenomenon is the essence of all human experience (Patton, 2002). Hursserl's Phenomenology, as it evolved through the 20th century, continued to make substantive contributions to the mental health field through the work of Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Alfred Schutz, and others (Macann, 1993; Spiegelberg, 1982). Hursserlian Phenomenology as a research method, by focusing on how people describe their experiences and how they experience them, seeks to understand how the world appears to them (Patton, 2002).

Alfred Schutz (1962) expounded on Hursserl's phenomenology by suggesting that our subjective experiences are meaningless until we actively, through reflecting, assign them meaning. In as such, a researcher cannot be said to know participant meanings directly, but rather indirectly and in terms of the meaning the researcher his or herself forms based on the participants' descriptions of their experience. Therefore, subjectivity of the participants and the inter-subjectivity of the researcher coexist and merge to form shared meanings of an experience. Phenomenology, in this sense, requires an objective stance in order to elicit the subjective experience of a participant through their

descriptions then assessing meaning based on common descriptions of multiple participants.

Given the subject matter for phenomenological inquiry is the lived experience of people, objective data collection involves certain essential processes. The first, identified by Husserl as epoche or bracketing, requires the researcher to "abstain from incorporating natural scientific theories, explanations, hypotheses, and conceptualizations of the subject matter" in order to gain access "to manifestations of the subject matter as it exists prior to and independent of scientific knowledge" (Wertz, 2005, p. 168). The researcher must be transformed through epoche in order to attend to the experience of others, while suspending any personal assumptions or judgments about the phenomenon, taking no positions and treating all descriptions equally prior to any interpretation (Speigelberg, 1982), perceiving things "freshly, as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34).

Eidetic reduction is an essential procedure established by Husserl that follows epoche. In a state of epoche, the researcher approaches the particular phenomenon of interest and through a process of reflective inquiry that is neither inductive nor deductive, but rather is what Wertz (2005) calls a descriptive delineation of the invariant characteristics that clarify the meaning and structure of the subject matter. Eidetic reduction involves Husserl's process of "free imaginative variation" that, as explained by Wertz, begins "with a concrete example of the phenomenon of which one wishes to grasp the essence and imaginatively varies it in every possible way in order to distinguish essential features from those that are accidental or incidental" (p. 168). Through this process, patterns of meaning or themes essential to the phenomenon begin to emerge and

can be accurately described and understood by that which makes something what it is rather than it being or becoming something else (Van Manen, 1990; Spiegelberg, 1982).

Researchers in health fields such as nursing and human service fields such as psychology, counseling psychology and sociology have utilized Phenomenology as a research method (Creswell, 1998; Wertz, 2005). I chose to utilize this method because I was interested in exploring the perceptions of school counselors regarding a GSA ban and how their reactions to it were impacted by their perceptions of it. The nature of the research questions supports a phenomenological approach.

Research Questions

This study explored the following questions: (a) How do school counselors employed in schools that have banned a GSA perceive and describe their experience of the ban? (b) How did the counselors' experience of the ban influence their advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations? (c) What suggestions do they have for school counselors facing similar situations?

To answer the research questions, an interview guide (Patton, 2002) was created (Appendix A) by the primary researcher, two former school counselors and one former community counselor enrolled in a doctoral program for counselor educators, and vetted by a qualitative research educator. The questions were piloted by the research team on two practicing school counselors in schools that have GSAs and during a pilot study with three school counselors employed in a school where GSAs were banned throughout their county's school system.

Pilot study

A pilot study preceded the development of the current study. The purpose of the pilot study was to identify constraints to effective data collection. The Institutional Review Board approved pilot study consisted of interviewing three school counselors whose school board had recently voted to ban all non-curricular clubs due to community opposition to the formation of a GSA. The primary constraint identified by this process was concerns about confidentiality due to the sensitive nature of the research topic.

The interviews took place in the school setting and permission from the principal had to be procured prior to entering the school and conducting them. This created a sense of vulnerability, particularly given the power differential between the school counselors and the principal. This is consistent with the literature regarding school counselor perceptions of a lack of administrative support for advocacy behaviors on behalf of students with minority sexual orientations and a fear of reprisal for engaging in such behaviors. Data collected during the pilot study will not be used in this study. The pilot study afforded the researcher an opportunity to experience the sensitive nature of the research topic and in doing so reaffirmed the necessity of exploring it.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of both data collection and data analysis. Because the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research, careful reflection on potential sources of researcher bias is required; therefore, reflexivity is a prerequisite and ongoing essential component of qualitative research. Reflexivity requires self-observation and awareness of the researcher's political and cultural perspectives of the experience under study. Potential biases are made explicit through the

process of reflexivity, allowing the researcher to "bracket" or set them aside (Creswell, 1998) throughout data collection and analysis. As a result, the researcher is not inclined to "prove a perspective" or manipulate data to support a "pre-disposed truth" (Patton, p. 51.)

Qualitative research is interested in understanding the depth of people's experiences. Through the development of close, personal contact with participants, the researcher seeks to understand an experience from their perspective. The techniques for doing so are interviews and observations. A qualitative researcher develops rapport with participants through a genuine interest in their stories and is skillful in eliciting responses from interview questions. As an observer, a qualitative researcher seeks to become and remain aware of the nuances within the interaction and relationship between themselves and participants during the interview. Therefore interviewing and observing are mutually exclusive and requires "empathic neutrality and mindfulness" (Patton, 2002) meaning a qualitative researcher withholds judgment "by showing openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness, and responsiveness" (p. 40.) while being fully present with participants.

Researchers with professional counseling backgrounds are well suited for qualitative research. The techniques of interviewing and observing in qualitative research are essential components of the practice of counseling. Professional counselors have received training in developing collaborative relationships with clients that are grounded in respect and empathy. Counselors utilize techniques and interventions during sessions that are designed to empower clients. As in qualitative research, through the practice of reflexivity, counselors seek to become aware of their biases, values, and beliefs that might impede the creation of a safe and collaborative relationship with their clients.

Counselors, as do qualitative researchers, make concerted efforts to understand, through the stories or narratives of their clients, their worldviews, the multiple dimensions of their identities, and the contextual, interrelatedness of their experience. (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996; Morrow, 2007; Young, 2005).

My educational and professional background includes a Master's degree in Counseling and over 20 years experience in the human services field as a counselor and social worker. During the course of my doctoral studies in Counselor Education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, I have taken several advanced courses in statistics, including two advanced courses in qualitative research methods that included proposing, conducting, and reporting a qualitative research project and collecting and analyzing qualitative data. I have also participated in tutorials conducted by a qualitative methodologist and researcher in the College of Education who serves on my dissertation committee. I maintain that these experiences served to guide me towards best practices as a qualitative researcher.

Researcher Subjectivity

I believe that my role as a heterosexual ally committed to social justice for people with minority sexual orientations was a strength as well as a potential source of bias in my study. I believe that discrimination against people with minority sexual orientations is one of the most important civil rights issues in our time. Further, as a professional counselor whose discipline has embraced social justice advocacy within a framework of multicultural competency, I believe that failing to address the social, cultural and political needs of this population is a grievous breach of ethics.

I also believe that school counselors in general genuinely want what is best for all of their student clients. I believe that moving beyond the "walls" of the school environment to advocate for them takes courage and confidence in one's skills and abilities. I strive to remain mindful that advocacy competency is developmental and participants may be at different levels in their development of it. I also believe that school counselors vary in the degree to which they fall within the homophobic/affirming spectrum of attitudes towards sexual minorities. Further, I believe people who have religious objections to homosexuality have a right to hold these beliefs. However, I do not believe it is their right to oppress or discriminate people with minority sexual orientations or allow such behavior to occur and persist.

The literature supports the developmental nature of advocacy competency as well as the existence of a range of emotional reactions of school counselors toward students with minority sexual orientations (Fontaine, 1998; Price & Telljohann, 1991; Trusty & Brown, 2005; Sears, 1991). The literature also supports the need for advocacy in the school for these students (Birden, et al., 2000; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Stone 2003). These students experience prejudice, discrimination, and verbal and physical harassment in the school setting.

My immersion in the literature regarding the school experience of students with minority sexual orientations added to my subjectivity. As a heterosexual ally, the literature affirms my belief in the importance of exploring incidents such as a GSA ban from the perspective of school counselors' because they are charged with ensuring that equal access and educational opportunities are available to all students. I believed that

doing so will to add to our understanding of how advocacy competency is developed and manifested in the school environment for this and other at risk student populations.

I drew upon my counseling skills to create a safe environment for data generation and collection, in anticipation that participants were likely to disclose a wide range of emotions regarding students with minority sexual orientations and their ethical obligation to advocate for them. As a researcher, I strived to bracket my beliefs and attempted to adopt a stance of empathic neutrality to prevent the blurring of my role of researcher with my professional identity as a counselor and my role of a heterosexual ally. To facilitate this process, I kept a reflexive journal throughout the data collection, analysis, and final report.

Following Patton's (2002) model of triangulated inquiry, my journal will contained reflexivity about the participants (How do they perceive me? How do I perceive them?) , about myself (What do I know? How do I know what I know?), and about the audience who will view the results (How do they perceive me? How do I perceive them?). Moustakas (1994, p. 59) regards the researcher's own "thinking, intuiting, reflecting, and judging" as "the primary evidences of scientific investigation" therefore the reflexive journal will be a part of the data corpus.

Research Plan

Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling seeks to identify participants who have experienced a phenomenon and who can provide rich descriptions of it (Creswell, 2005). This study purposely recruited school counselors who are or were working in a school setting in which a GSA was banned and who are members of ASCA. In addition to purposeful

sampling, a second strategy, snowball sampling, was employed to increase the pool of potential participants.

The basic premise of snowball sampling is that certain members of a specific population will be aware of others among them who belong to the sought after subgroup of that population who, in turn, will be aware of other members in the subgroup, allowing for a series of referrals within this subgroup (Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling "typically proceeds after a study begins and occurs when the researcher asks participants to recommend other individuals to study" (Creswell, 2005, p. 206). School counselors who participated in the study were asked if they are aware of other school counselors who are or were working in a school setting that banned a GSA and if so, to forward recruitment information to these individuals or provide the researcher with the contact information.

Sample size

Patton suggests, "There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (2002, p. 244) and recommends specifying the minimum number of participants for the study based on the purpose of the study and how many participants can be expected to reasonably cover the phenomenon. Likewise, Morrow (2005) suggests that the quality, length, and depth of the interviews are more important than sample size. Further, Wertz (2005) recommends "critical reflection considering the research problem, the life-world position of the participant(s), the quality of the data, and the value of emergent findings with regard to research goals" to assess adequacy of sample size while keeping in mind that sample size "always limits the results" (Wertz, 2005, p. 171).

There are at least 14 documented incidents of GSA bans in school systems throughout the United States. There is no way of determining how many bans have actually occurred that have remained under the radar of the media. Five participants came forward to participate in this study. Given this experience has not been examined in the literature and the controversial nature of the research topic, these five participant stories were adequate for the purpose of exploring in-depth the experience of a GSA ban.

Participants

Participants in this research are five licensed school counselors with membership in ASCA who are, or were, working in a school within the contiguous United States that banned a Gay-Straight Alliance club. It was necessary to select school counselors that met this criterion as the purpose of this study sought to explore their unique experience with this phenomenon and its influence on their ethical obligation to advocate for students with minority sexual orientations

Gaining Entry

Professional school counselors with membership in ASCA are ethically mandated to advocate for students with minority sexual orientations, therefore I recruited participants from this organization after approval for the study was granted from the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (IRB). I obtained ground mail addresses from the ASCA membership directory from regions where GSA bans have occurred. I then sent out 600 introductory letters inviting participation in this study. (Appendix B). I was also given approval to recruit participants via email providing a public email address was available for school counselors in targeted areas. To this end I sent out 130 emails. Further, I distributed 150

postcards at a professional counselor conference asking that interested participants contact me. (Appendix C). I also posted a note on the Facebook social networking bulletin boards of GLSEN and PFLAG (Appendix D).

Measures to Ensure Confidentiality

Four participants initiated contact with me by phone or email to schedule their interviews. One participant initiated contact with me face-to-face at a conference. Upon this initial contact, I gave or sent via email participants a copy of the informed consent (Appendix E). Prior to initiating data collection, I discussed with the participants confidentiality, its limits, potential discomfort associated with discussing controversial topics, and their rights as participants to withdraw from the study at anytime without recourse from the researcher. I conducted two face-to-face interviews and three telephone interviews. The telephone interviews were necessary as geographical distance between me and the participants prohibited traveling to meet them face-to-face.

Data collection and storage procedures were explained, ensuring the participants that no identifying information will be attached to the data and who (members of my dissertation committee and me) will have access to the data. I ensured participants that after analysis I would destroy raw data that is collected. I gave participants an opportunity to ask questions about the study's procedures. If in agreement, the participants signed the informed consent to indicate they understood and agreed to the study's procedures and affirmed that they were eligible and willing to participate. Data collection for the telephone interviews did not proceed until I received via fax the signed informed consent forms.

Data Collection Procedures

Participants selected met the purposeful sampling criterion. I used an interview guide format (see Appendix A) during the semi-structured interviews in order to increase comprehensiveness of the data and ensure that a systematic line of inquiry across interviews was followed (Patton, 2002). This format provided structure to the interview while allowing me the flexibility to "develop questions, sequence those questions, and make decisions about which information to pursue in greater depth" (Patton, 2002, p. 243).

Upon IRB approval, I conducted the face-to-face or telephone interviews. Each interview ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews were audio taped. At the conclusion of the interviews, I asked participants to complete a brief demographic profile (Appendix F). I transcribed each interview verbatim into a word document, organized them by participant identification number, and saved them in files on a password-protected computer. They were stored in this manner until I began data analysis.

I also took notes during the interviews. Patton (2002) recommends that taking notes during an interview be strategic, focusing on key phrases, terms, or word of respondents that will serve to expand on something said or to facilitate data analysis by indicating important quotations to locate during the analysis. Taking notes during the interview will also serve to bracket the researcher's interpretations, observations, thoughts, feelings or ideas that may surface during the course of the interview (Patton, 2002). Notes taken during the interview are part of the data corpus.

Data Analysis

While there is no single, accepted approach to analyzing qualitative data, consistent rigorous standards that proceed from the methodological approach, research questions, and overall research design must be applied (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Based on the nature of the research questions, I used a modification of phenomenological data analysis in that data was analyzed using descriptive codes (Moustakas, 1994), or pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and axial or analytic coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In phenomenological research, participants provide detailed descriptions of an experience. The researcher, after setting aside preconceptions and biases, analyzes these descriptions to determine the underlying meaning of the experience for all participants (Moustakas, 1994). The meaning of the experience is revealed through key themes and patterns that emerge across participant descriptions. It is through the process of coding the data that the themes and patterns, as well as variations, are determined. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that coding "is analysis" (p. 56), beginning with initial codes that describe the phenomenon in general then moving toward pattern coding that serves to provide a more focused, integrated exploration, followed by analytic interpretation, of the data.

Data generated in this study includes participant interviews, field notes, and my reflexive journal. I took the following steps [italicized] to prepare, analyze, and interpret the data generated in this study:

1. *I described my interest in and experience with the phenomenon.* Moustakas (1994) emphasizes the role of the researchers' interest in the phenomenon.

Therefore, prior to data collection, the researcher must examine his or her personal history with the phenomenon, bracket this history, and suspend judgments regarding the phenomenon until sufficient evidence is acquired which elucidates the essence of the phenomenon. This serves to promote objectivity and minimize the possibility of data contamination with researcher bias.

I have detailed many core beliefs I have regarding the advocacy for sexual minorities under the heading "Researcher Subjectivity." While I have no first- hand experience related to a GSA ban nor have I ever worked in a school setting, I have encountered discrimination of a student with a minority sexual orientation in the school setting while employed as a counselor in a community setting. Appendix G contains a description of this encounter.

2. *I immersed myself into the data before I prepared it for analysis.* I listened to the audio-taped interviews once then proceeded to transcribe them verbatim. I read my field notes and reflexive journal and transcribed them into a readable, word document segmented by date and identified by participant number.

3. *After the transcriptions were completed, I sent each participant a copy of their transcript via mail for them to examine for accuracy.* The participants returned their transcripts within the two-week deadline with minor changes made regarding spelling and grammar, and answering in narrative form some follow up questions. Participant two called me for her follow up inquiry.

4. *Initial coding of the data commenced after participants checked them for accuracy.* Initial coding of the data serves to identify key themes and patterns of segmented data and link them based on some common property or element

(Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). In this step, I engaged an independent coder, a doctoral candidate experienced in qualitative data analysis. Demographically described, she is a white, heterosexual woman who has completed her coursework toward a doctorate in Counselor Education and is currently working on a qualitative dissertation. The use of an independent coder serves as a method of analytic triangulation, providing a source for constant comparison and discussion of the similarities and differences in the data (Glaser & Struass, 1967; Patton, 2002.)

To begin the process of data analysis, each of us independently examined the first transcribed interview to develop initial descriptive codes for the participant's responses to the interview questions. The transcripts were retrieved from their computer file and printed in document form with extra wide margins on either side. The independent coder and I read the transcript multiple times, writing a few words in the left margin as ideas about the meaning and relationships of text segments came to mind. We each read the transcripts again, assigning a word or phrase that categorized the meaning of each segment and wrote it in the right margin. Each of us highlighted the participant's words that supported the categories.

Next, axial or analytic coding was used to link the descriptive codes relationally. In axial or analytic coding, (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the researcher assembles the data in new ways after categorizing the data. In this process, each identified category is explored to determine the conditions that give rise to it, the context in which it is embedded, the actions and interactions within the category,

strategies by which the actions and interactions are handled, and the consequences of those strategies (Creswell, 1998). In other words, axial coding groups the descriptive categories by relating them in terms of when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences, thus giving them greater explanatory power (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

When each of us completed the initial descriptive categorizing and analytic coding of the first transcript, we met and came to a consensus on the codes. We repeated this process on two additional interview transcripts meeting again to come to consensus on codes (Creswell, 1998; Glaser & Struass, 1967; Patton, 2002).

5. *An initial coding manual was created to analyze the remaining interview transcripts.* To create the coding manual, the independent coder and I grouped the codes produced in step four in categories, reducing the initial codes into units of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To group the codes into categories we applied a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), asking whether each code was similar or different, until all the codes were grouped thematically. We made decisions about eliminating redundancy in the codes and determined if the codes appropriately represented the data.

We independently apply the revised codes to the next two transcripts, adding or modifying codes for additional categories that emerged, and met again to come to a consensus. We continued this process until the data was saturated, the point where categories were fully developed and the remaining transcript provided no additional codes (Creswell, 2005).

To illustrate the coding process, Table 1 below provides examples of participant quotes and the corresponding assigned codes:

Table 1

Example of Coding

Participant quote	Codes
…see role as a student advocate…That's about 90% of it.…that's my mantra…advocate for them with their parents …advocate for them if they are underserved…how it will impact students how will it better students …working with teachers in terms of helping students …having someone within the school system that can address not only issues within the classroom but also issues in the home and community …serve as a buffer between kids and teachers	advocacy, benefitting students,
…making sure we have what we need… whatever we need in the counseling department in terms of resources… ensure that we have the tools and support to do our job as counselors	resources, tools, support
…it is my job to reinforce ethical trainings…make sure that everyone is treated equally …address any issues that are getting in the way of their academic progress in school… …as a school counselor it is my job to address anything that is causing academic failure	ethics
…depression and lack of support…Issues related to coming out….bullying in the school…not getting support from their families…experiencing a lot of rejection…confusion over sexual preferences…bullying, discrimination	barriers
Any student that is struggling is a motivator for me… … I have a real passion for these kids and what they have to go through…anything we can do at school to make them feel more comfortable	motivation
…know your community, be prepared, know what other resources are available in the broader community… know the law, approach things from a legal standpoint… know who your allies are	increase knowledge

6. *When all of the transcripts were analyzed, a manual with the codes organized by categories was developed.* From the codes, the following categories were developed: professional identity, role of administrator, perceptions of minority

orientations, ethics, community characteristics, reactions/strategies, changes over time, and recommendations. Using the final coding manual, the independent coder and I reviewed every transcript again to ensure that all of the interview transcripts supported it. This involved consciously searching for and discussing segments of the data that contradicted the patterned codes to prevent biasing the data. Called negative case analysis, examining them allows for a deeper analysis of the complexities of the phenomenon and more elaborate interpretation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

7. *From the coding manual, a textural description for each participant was constructed.* This step required the categorized statements to be developed into a description of the textures (what happened) of the experience. This individual textural description is a narrative elaboration on the categories for a particular participant. In this, verbatim examples from the participants are used. A composite textural description was created to synthesize the textural similarities and differences of the participants' experience. .

8. From the textural descriptions for each participant, a structural description was constructed. This process required reflecting on each textural description through the process of imaginative variation wherein the researcher reflects on each description and imagines the "possible structures of time, space, materiality, causality, and relationship to self and to others" (Moustakas, 1999, p. 99). These structures are evaluated for "all possible meanings and divergent perspectives, varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon" followed by "the construction of a description of how the phenomenon was experienced"

(Creswell, 1998, p. 150) for each participant. A composite structural description was created to synthesize the similarities and differences of how the participants experienced the GSA ban.

9. *The textural-structural descriptions of each participant were analyzed for emergent themes.* Single participant analysis of the descriptions was utilized in order to reflect on the context of each participant's experience. The themes that emerged were further evaluated across participants to reveal within case similarities and differences (Patton, 2002).

10. *A synthesis of the composite textural and structural description was created.* This composite is a synthesis of the meaning and essence of what was experienced by all participants. The synthesis was constructed to "reduce the textural (what) and structural (how) meanings of experience to a brief description that typifies the experiences of all of the participants in the study" (Creswell, 1998, p. 235).

11. *Remaining data sources (field notes and reflexive journal) were coded.* My field notes and reflexive journal (coded independently) served as a tool to prevent bias in data interpretation. From these codes, I constructed a description of my personal reflections on the research process.

These steps described how I analyzed the data, safeguarded data analysis from bias, and informed the conclusions I made about the data. The textural-structural descriptions and their emergent themes will be presented in Chapter Four as the findings of the data analysis. The conclusions made generated implications for future research concerning advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations and other at risk

student populations. These implications, along with my personal reflections will be reported in Chapter Five of this dissertation.

Verification Procedures

Qualitative research is evaluated in terms of its trustworthiness or how authentically the findings represent the meaning and essence of the phenomenon as described by the participants (Creswell, 1998, Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The meaning or essence is invariant, or in other words, all participants experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher must present the results with a "credible, authoritative, authentic, and trustworthy voice" that "engages the reader through rich description, thoughtful sequencing, appropriate use of quotes and contextual clarity so that the reader joins the inquirer in the search for meaning" (Patton, 2002, p. 65). At best, the reader is lead to "adopt new perspectives, to see something from a different point of view, and to reexamine [their] own theoretical constructs" about the phenomenon (Glesne, 2006, p. 213). In summary, trustworthiness is judged by the dependability of the researcher, the credibility of the data analysis, and the transferability and confirmability of the findings.

Dependability assumes that the way the research is conducted is consistent across time and researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I maintained an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002) that included steps taken throughout the development of the research, data collection and analysis, and the reporting of the findings. Process notes, raw data, data reduction methods, field notes, and my reflexive journal were included in the audit trail. A reviewer with expertise in qualitative research independently reviewed my audit trail and evaluated the dependability of the research process from beginning to end (Patton, 2002).

During data analysis, I engaged an independent coder experienced in qualitative methods to collaborate on the development of consistent codes and themes for data reduction and analysis. Using an independent coder and collaborating on data analysis serves to enhance dependability in that different perspectives about the data are considered (Patton, 2002). I consulted with peer debriefers (members of my dissertation committee, my independent coder, counselors with experience in treating clients with minority sexual orientations, and doctoral candidates from the Educational Leadership department that were enrolled with me in a qualitative data analysis class) throughout the data collection, analysis, and interpretive process. Peer debriefers serve to enhance dependability by helping the researcher examine whether or not the conclusions made about the data in each step of the process represent the participants' descriptions rather than the researcher's beliefs about them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility involves using rigorous methods to ensure participants, researchers, and consumers of the research that the results are believable and reasonable. Analytic triangulation enhances credibility. Analytic triangulation involves using multiple of sources of data and multiple investigators during data analysis (Glesne, 2006). Data generated and analyzed in this study are participant interviews, field notes, and a reflexive journal.

An independent coder and I performed the data analysis. The use of an independent coder is a form of analytic triangulation that provides assurances that the data analysis is credible in that someone other than the researcher methodically examined each transcript. The independent coder and I made decisions about the data in a collaborative manner, therefore enhancing the credibility of my findings (Patton, 2002).

Negative case analysis also enhances credibility of the results. Participant experiences that did not follow the patterns generated during the data analysis were described and included in the results. Inclusion of negative cases helps safe guard against bias, lending credibility to the overall conclusions of the researcher (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Participants also assisted in preparing their interviews for analysis by providing feedback regarding the accuracy of their transcribed interviews. . Called member checking, this process lends credibility to the research (Creswell, 2005).

Transferability involves the extent to which the research findings are applicable or transferable to other times, settings, situations, and/or people (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability is demonstrated through an adequate detailed or "thick" description of the participants' experience of the phenomenon. (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Efforts to enhance transferability of this study include the interview protocol which was designed to elicit "the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83) of the participants about the GSA ban within the context of their professional obligations and work setting.

Further, I methodically analyzed each participant interview, as outlined under the "Data Analysis" section, for patterns and themes. The patterns and themes that emerged were supported by verbatim quotes to "allow the reader to enter into the situation and thoughts of the people represented in the report" (Patton, 2002 p. 503) In addition, the written demographic information provided by the participants assisted in describing them in as much detail as possible. My reflexive journal, field notes, and audit trail served to

create a detailed description of my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors throughout the research process.

Confirmability is the extent to which the findings of the research are formed by the participants' responses versus researcher bias, motives, or interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmabilty requires an effort on the part of qualitative researchers to clarify prior to data collection and analysis their "past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study" (Creswell, 1998, p. 202).

In my subjectivity statement recorded previously in this document under the "Researcher Subjectivity" heading, I examined my reasons for conducting this study and explored potential biases that may influence data collection and analysis. I also described my thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors regarding a personal experience with discrimination of a student with a minority sexual orientation within the school system in step one of the data analysis procedures.

Selected peer debriefers and an independent coder described previously assisted in the continued exploration of these issues and beliefs throughout the research process. Additionally, my reflexive journal aided in the constant examination of my assumptions and biases throughout the research process. Finally, the expert review of my audit trail, described previously, serves to enhance confirmability through an evaluation of how I interpretively reconstructed the data (Patton, 2002).

Summary

In this chapter, I presented a rationale for employing qualitative methodology, namely Phenomenology, to explore the perceptions of school counselors who are

working or have worked in a school that banned a GSA. Phenomenology holds that we can only know what we experience and we make meaning of our experiences through the describing, explaining, and interpreting of them. This approach, therefore, was the one most appropriate for the research purpose and questions. Steps for recruiting participants and ethical considerations regarding confidentiality were explained. Procedures for data collection and analysis were described. Lastly, verification procedures and methods to enhance trustworthiness of the findings were reviewed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The findings of the analysis of the categories derived from the procedures outlined in chapter three are presented in this chapter. The categories included professional identity, role of administration, perceptions of students with minority sexual orientations, ethics, motivation to support a GSA, community characteristics, recommendations, and changes over time. First, these categories were explored across participants and individual textural descriptions were developed for each one. Background information was included in the textural descriptions so that a richer portrait of each participant could be presented.

Next, the individual textural descriptions were synthesized to create a composite textural description. The textural descriptions were then analyzed through the process of imaginative variation and a structural description of each participant was created. Subsequently, the structural descriptions were analyzed thematically and emergent themes were explicated. Finally, a composite textural-structural description was created to provide a general essence of how the participants' perceived a GSA ban and how their perceptions influenced advocacy.

Textural Description: Bob

Background information

Bob is a 58-year-old heterosexual white male. He learned about this study via an email invitation to participate forwarded to him by his State's ASCA president. Bob's

interview was by telephone. His professional goal to become a counselor began "when I was a senior in high school I actually started working as a summer camp counselor; I did that every summer through college." He majored in education "but with the idea that I would eventually get into counseling." As a teacher, he worked in special education with severely behaviorally disabled students." After he "acquired classroom experience," Bob enrolled in graduate school and earned a Master's degree in education with a school counseling certification. While the university he attended as a graduate student was not CACREP accredited during his tenure as a student, it has since become so.

Currently, he holds a district administrator position that involves consulting, supervising and training school counselors throughout his school district. Bob describes his district as a "mix of very rural to urban schools" in a Northwestern state. He has 31 years of combined experience as an educator, counselor, and administrator in a school setting. Bob is a member of ASCA and assists other districts with implementing the ASCA model in schools throughout his state. Bob describes his political orientation as "liberal."

Bob reports that during graduate school, he completed a 15-week course in multicultural and diversity issues. He was unable to determine the exact number in hours of training related specifically to counseling individuals with minority sexual orientations but his interest in this area has been extensive.

Professional identity

Bob identifies as a student advocate, stating, "I believe that my role *is* to be an advocate for the physical and emotional health and basic human rights for *all* students. It is a core part of my personal and professional ethos." Bob perceives an advocate as

someone, who not only addresses issues within the school or home, but also addresses issues in the larger community that impact the academic achievement of students. This involves collaborating with other agencies, implementing intervention and prevention programs, and discovering resources such as federal grants that serve to enhance the learning environment of at-risk students. Of his current role as an administrator he said "while I'm not directly involved in school counseling services any more, I do training and consulting with counselors" regarding how to meet student needs.

Role of Administration

Bob believes that "administrators have a vested interest in doing what is best for students in terms of providing the tools and support that school counselors and teachers need to do their jobs." Administrators have the "expectation that staff members are competent professionals and rather than micro manage, allow staff to perform their duties creatively and effectively as long as they remain within ethical guidelines and mandated policies and procedures." As an administrator himself, Bob strives "to provide school counselors with respectful support and guidance."

Perception of students with minority orientations

Bob is aware of the specific issues that students with minority sexual orientations face that are barriers to academic achievement. Bob believes that the "lack of support these students experience in their home, school, and community environments and at times outright rejection leads to depression and suicidal tendencies." These are significant barriers to their academic achievement and overall successful school experience. Bob is also aware that "bullying, struggling with acceptance and issues related to coming out

create interpersonal issues that impede their maximum performance socially, personally, and academically."

As an administrator and in his former role as a school counselor, Bob holds affirming views of students and adults with minority sexual orientations. He attributes these attitudes to his having throughout his life "friends and acquaintances that are gay that gave me connections to their world and their experience." Further, his awareness of the impact of homophobic or homo-negative views of minority sexual orientations increased through his work as a school counselor. He describes "Early on, dealing with students that were depressed and suicidal and discovering a very high percentage of those students were struggling with sexual orientation issues or were experiencing rejection from their families" was a primary "motivator for me to say that we need to be doing more to support students that are struggling with those issues."

Ethics

Bob is also a member of ASCA and strives to adhere to the ethics this professional organization has explicated regarding advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations. Bob considers it his "job to reinforce ethics" and he does so by providing information plus in-service training with school counselors and other staff on how to support students with minority sexual orientations. In his role as a school counselor, he was a visible ally for these students thereby earning their trust and a reputation for being affirming and respectful.

Motivation to support a GSA

During the time Bob was a school counselor, some students approached him about forming a Gay-Straight Alliance. "There had been another High School in another

district that had garnered some media attention regarding their GSA." This school had been successful in implementing a GSA. Bob believed "that starting a GSA would be beneficial in many ways" based on his experience with students "struggling with issues related to sexual orientation." Some students with minority sexual orientations he had counseled were "in a pretty bad space" he believed that assisting them with forming the GSA was another way "to be more supportive of the kids I was working with."

Bob encouraged the students who wanted the GSA. He also perceived that there was "a fair amount of support from our faculty and staff to have such a program." Bob was very surprised at the time "there was not a huge amount of backlash" from the community but there was "a little bit of backlash in terms of some parents who didn't want to deal with their own kid's issues." His primary concern was whether his administrator would allow it. Bob described his administrator as holding "traditional views about sexual orientation" therefore he "blocked the inclusion of a support group as part of our group counseling program." Adding to Bob's frustration, "the central administration of the school district at that time was not supportive or enlightened either." Bob was "not surprised that the GSA was rebuffed."

Community characteristics

Bob described the larger community in which the school was located as "very, very conservative" populated by a majority that "consistently votes for conservative, Republican representatives for state and national government, votes against any kind of domestic partner rights for GLBQT peoples, and letters to the editor of local paper often reflect racial or gender bias and homophobia." In addition, present in the community are "a large numbers of conservative, evangelical Christian churches that take non-

progressive positions on a variety of issues, such as equal rights for gays or minorities, gun-control, abortion rights, and so on."

Reaction/strategy

Due to the characteristics of his community Bob was not surprised that the administrator did not allow the GSA. Further, Bob perceived that pressing the issue with administration would have been "a big battle" and rather than engage in "battle" Bob realized that he was in a "unique position." Bob explains "at the time I still had a part-time private practice so I had a private office and I was a registered counselor with the state. When the opportunity to do it on campus was not available, I moved it off campus and so I was able to provide the service anyway. An interesting benefit that resulted was that I was able to include students from other high schools in the district that did not have a GSA either."

Changes over time

Since this incident, Bob reports there are number of gay straight alliances in many of the local high schools. Bob proposes, "Over time as attitudes change and times change, it is not unusual or less controversial for students to want a GSA club primarily because the administration has become more aware of the legal aspects of providing supportive services to gay and lesbian students." However "despite the fact that GSA's are now present in that district's high schools, that district's superintendent recently prohibited one of the local high school's plans to present *The Laramie Project* as a school play."

Bob is also "encouraged that there seems to be a higher level of acceptance in our community" but is discouraged that people with minority sexual orientations "many of whom are my friends, still have to be cautious and protective of their identities and are

uncomfortable being ‘out’ in their professional lives.” To Bob this is a “loss for kids who are struggling who are not able to see that there are many positive role models available to them.” However, Bob believes that change is coming slowly as evidenced by the recent crossing of party lines by two Republican representatives from the area who voted in support of a domestic partnership bill.

Professionally, Bob is pleased that “the response has been good” to the training he provides at the local level and at state conferences on counseling students with minority sexual orientations. “There are a lot more people doing that kind of work now” but Bob also accepts that “there is a certain part of our population that is going to struggle with that issue until the whole culture and society becomes more accepting.”

Recommendations

Based on his experience, Bob has several suggestions for school counselors who faced with a similar situation related to forming a GSA in their school. First, know the law and approach things from a legal aspect, namely that the *Equal Access Act* covers GSAs. Second, know who your allies are and network with organizations that emphasis civil rights such as a Teacher’s Union to push back the opposition. Finally, know that normalization of minority sexual orientations will go a long way to help students “who struggle with acceptance” due to the “overall attitude of their parents and others about what is normal sexuality and what is not.” In Bob’s “ideal world” supportive services for students with minority sexual orientations “ would come to be viewed as just one of the range of many services we provide for students with issues that are getting in the way of being emotionally healthy and being successful students.”

Textural description: Jill

Background information

Jill learned about this study through a letter sent via the postal service to ASCA members. Jill's interview was face-to-face in her office at school. She is a 38-year-old white heterosexual female working as a school counselor in a suburban district in the capital city of a Southeastern state. Jill began her career as a teacher, eventually deciding that she wanted to "get out of the classroom but remain in the school environment."

Jill began working as a school counselor after six years of teaching. She currently performs a dual role, teaching and counseling, which creates a great deal of frustration because she "can't do the job she was trained to do as a counselor because the demands of my teaching duties limits the time I can devote to counseling." Her total number of years as a professional in a school setting is 12 years. Jill describes her political orientation as "moderate."

Jill reports that she has received about 20 hours of multicultural training and coursework, which includes a semester long multicultural and diversity course in graduate school. Regarding minority sexual orientations, she has received 10 hours, which includes a "safe zone" training course on how to be a visible ally for students with minority orientations.

Professional identity

Jill perceives her primary role as a counselor is to advocate for students. As an advocate, Jill communicates with parents and teachers on behalf of students. Students often feel "alone and misunderstood and with a school counselor on their side teachers may be willing to give them some extra help along the way." Jill also believes that being

an advocate means working with students problem solving and decision-making. To her, a school counselor "plays a vital role in helping students academically and socially by ensuring their needs are being met in the school environment." Jill finds her role rewarding in that her work with students may make "at least some kind of impression that contributes to positive changes they may make."

Jill's professional identity as a counselor is strong. However, for the past three years Jill has experienced a good deal of role conflict. She is an "education specialist" and her administrator tapped her to split her duties between counseling and teaching. These circumstances create a great deal of frustration because she "can't do the job she was trained to do because the demands of my teaching duties limit my time as a counselor."

Role of Administration

On the one hand, Jill describes her administrator as providing the tools needed to perform duties according to "guidelines and best educational practices" and on the other she describes him as limiting her ability to perform her counseling job as expected due to his diminishment of her counseling role. Jill perceives administrators as powerful, describing hers as "controlling." She believes that administrators "do what they want and everything that happens or does not happen in schools is up to the administrator." She perceives the central administration as yielding to individual administrators, giving the example from her own forced dual role: "Our district supervisor has sent memos out to all of the schools discouraging the use of school counselors as teachers but, again, administrators can do what they want." Further, she perceives that she does not "have control over what I'm told to do by my administrator."

Perception of students with minority orientations

Jill is aware of the specific issues that minority populations face regarding barriers to academic achievement, stating, "As a school counselor it is my job to address anything that is causing academic failure." She views students with minority sexual orientations as academically at risk due to "bullying and harassment, being singled out as different and parental beliefs all of which may lead to depression."

Jill holds affirming views of students and adults with minority sexual orientations. She believes that "not everybody is the same and some people try to make people the same or fit into what they consider is normal. A person's sexual orientation is nothing to be threatened by." She believes that "having to hide or being singled out because of who you are is hurtful and depressing." To Jill, sexual orientation should not matter and the practice of making judgments about people based solely on this basis is "ridiculous." It is important to Jill that students with minority sexual orientations know that she is a safe person. However, Jill reported, "it's been a while, since I've seen a kid with those issues but I know that we have gay and lesbian students that are not out."

Ethics

Jill is also a member of ASCA and is aware of the ethics this professional organization has explicated regarding advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations. Ethically Jill is to ensure that students with minority orientations are "treated equally and not discriminated against by addressing any issues that are getting in the way of their academic progress." To do so, she must make sure that students with minority orientations and others in the school environment are aware that she is a "safe person" who holds affirming views of minority orientations. For Jill, "any student who is

struggling motivates me gay, straight, or otherwise" and students with minority orientations "have a right to the same things that other students."

Motivation to support a GSA

Because of her visibility as an affirming ally to students with minority orientations, she was approached by a teacher who had been advising a group of students who wanted to form a GSA in the school. In the role of consultant, Jill informed the teacher that the students "had a right" to form the club. Jill also told the teacher she would be supportive of the club, believing that a GSA would be one way for students with minority orientations 'feel more included in the general school environment." Further, Jill believed that the GSA would provide a space for students to "get together and talk" so that having a minority orientation "would possibly become less controversial or threatening by addressing issues such as stereotyping and bullying."

Jill encouraged the teacher to support the students although she had doubts that the administrator would allow the students to form the club. Jill perceived the overall attitude of faculty as being somewhat neutral, being neither for nor against the club. She was aware that some faculty "didn't think the GSA was necessary" because "there is not a huge problem with bullying or harassment" and this issues are dealt with under a "no tolerance policy." In addition, a few faculty members questioned the motives of the initiating students, wondering if they were "doing it for attention." Even faculty with these attitudes was not opposed to the club, understanding that the students, if they wanted the club, were "entitled to it." Otherwise, Jill reports there were no strong reactions against the GSA.

The administrator, as Jill had anticipated, turned down the students' request for the club. Her administrator believed that having a minority orientation was "an issue they would be more prepared to deal with when they got to high school." Primarily she perceived his denial as a way for him to avoid "getting into a confrontation with parents" that may have objections to the club.

Community characteristics

Jill underscores her lack of surprise over the denial of the GSA as the administrator's and her administrator's desire to avoid confrontation from parents with a description of the larger community: "We live in a conservative area and we are lucky to have a GSA in the high schools, if you want to know the truth about it. I know many parents that would not have wanted a GSA in the middle school. It was difficult enough for them when they found out we had one at the high school." Jill describes her community further: "We have a number of evangelical or fundamentalist Christian churches here that are very active in the community. Many of our local politicians and elected officials are members of these type churches. Most people here are just not progressive in their thinking, especially when it comes to sexual orientation."

Reaction/strategy

Because of Jill's perceptions of her administrator, she believes that any further efforts would have been futile because "the administrator had already made up his mind" therefore "no one said anything, we just left it alone." Jill would be supportive of forming a GSA was initiated but she does not believe her administrator has "has changed his mind." Jill feels limited by her administrator in that while she has the desire to "do the job she was trained to do," she cannot perform optimally because "counseling is not

priority" for him. Counseling and all that it entails takes time and presently Jill's time for it is severely limited.

Changes over time

In Jill's community, some of the high schools have GSAs and the students with minority orientations that will be attending these schools as they leave middle school will have an opportunity to participate in campus based supportive services. She continues to perceive her community as "very conservative" even though the visibility of people with minority orientations has increased. With this increased exposure, Jill believes it is becoming less "unusual" to see people with minority orientations that are "out" and "empowered to advocate for themselves." Further, she believes that "since kids are coming out younger these days, I think we'll see more of a need. Unfortunately, the way things are with my teaching and counseling, I just don't have the time to really have a good handle on what's going on with students, other than with the kids I see in my classroom and the ones that I do get to see for counseling." Jill also believes the increased visibility has opened up a conversation about sexual orientation that, while slow, may prepare the community for more changes.

Recommendations

Based on her experience, Jill has several suggestions for school counselors faced with a similar situation related to forming a GSA in their school. First, she would determine a number of things such as, the motivation of the students who wanted to form the club, the need for the GSA, and the level of interest in overall school environment. She also suggests arranging a meeting with students and sponsors from schools with established GSAs to determine what to expect from a GSA and how a GSA has

benefitted the overall school environment. After these determinations are made approach the administrator with the request, showing from them a GSA "is not as controversial as it may seem to be."

Textural description: Tim

Background information

Tim learned about this study via an email invitation to participate forwarded to ASCA members by his State's ASCA president. Tim's interview was by telephone. He is a 46-year-old white heterosexual male working as an assistant administrator in a suburban school in a Southern state. His highest degree completed is a PhD. He began his career in education as a teacher then, upon realizing he was helping students deal with "significant personal issues," he decided to become a school counselor. He has a Master's degree in school counseling from a CACREP accredited university, obtained his license, and practiced in the school setting for 13 years. His total number of years as a professional in a school setting is 23. He describes his school setting as suburban and is located in a Southern state. He identifies his political views as "moderate." He is a member of ASCA.

During graduate school, Tim reports receiving 6 to 9 hours of course work on issues related to multicultural and diversity issues. Regarding minority sexual orientations, he reports, "None but it's touched on in the counseling multicultural populations' course but it was quite honestly, one of those subjects that are passed over. I have never had a formal class per se on counseling GLBT folks at all." Tim reports that he taught the multicultural and diversity course to counseling students as an adjunct professor and in it included in depth information on minority sexual orientations.

Professional identity

Tim views his primary role, from both the perspective of a school counselor and vice administrator, is as a student advocate. His "mantra" as he makes decisions that will affect students, is "how will this help students." Therefore, he is intentional in his actions, focusing on how they will "support the academic achievement of students and/or help them realize their goals after high school." As such, counselors in his school do a lot of classroom guidance and facilitate groups that, for example, "help students discover post secondary options or help discover ways to constructively explore destructive anger and change problem behavior."

Other ways Tim believes school counselors advocate for students include providing individual counseling and serving as a "buffer" between students and teachers. Tim believes "personal issues stemming from within the home or interpersonal relationships with other students are often pretty heavy" and as such may interfere with successful performance in the classroom. Becoming aware of these issues during a counseling session may require the school counselor to advocate on a student's behalf that teachers, for example, "give more time on an assignment or approach the student in a different way." Tim describes his experience as a school counselor as very rewarding in terms of helping students develop personally and achieve academically.

Role of administration

Tim describes his administrator as supportive of the counseling department at his school. His administrator provides "whatever we need in the counseling department in terms of resources, even adding a counseling position to help improve counselor-student ratio." His administrator does not "micro manage," instead allows counselors to "run

their own shop." Tim believes that his administrator views counselors as "true professionals" capable of doing their jobs without interference from him. However, he concedes, "some decisions are made for me at a higher level."

Perceptions of students with minority orientations

Tim is aware of the specific issues that minority populations face regarding barriers to academic achievement. He views students with minority sexual orientations as academically at risk due to "confusion over sexual preferences, bullying, discrimination, victimization, higher rates of suicide and risky behaviors such as sexual acting out, alcohol and drug abuse, and rejection from family." He believes that students with minority sexual orientations often feel like "outcasts and are likely to be more introverted or self-absorbed than other students." Tim has developed "a real passion for these kids and what they have to go through."

As an administrator and in his former role as a school counselor, Tim holds affirming views of students and adults with minority sexual orientations. His experiences of counseling students with minority orientations and his deep and abiding affection for an influential gay family member has motivated him to make sure that students with minority sexual orientations " know that they have a firm advocate in a building who will listen to them, not judge them, and make them feel like they are welcome." Because of his visibility, the students are aware that Tim is a "compassionate and empathetic listener, I'm not judgmental, and I don't discuss with their parents anything they tell me unless it of course involves harm to themselves or others."

Ethics

Tim is also a member of ASCA and strives to adhere to the ethics this professional organization has explicated regarding advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations. He highlights the mandate of "being inclusive and respecting the rights of all students" and works with teachers and counselors regarding how to address the needs of students with minority sexual orientations as per the ASCA standards. Among other activities, Tim leads a seminar on how to counsel this student population and provide more opportunities for inclusion and participation across the personal, social, and academic domains of the school setting.

Motivation to support GSA

Because of his visibility, a group of students who wanted to start a Gay-Straight Alliance approached Tim. Tim agreed, stating that he wanted to help them, that he believed a GSA would help these students and their allies "feel like that had a niche in school." Tim also believed that a GSA would be beneficial in making students with minority sexual orientations "feel more comfortable" and a part of the school.

Tim also believes that "most high schools need that supportive service" a GSA can provide. Tim described the faculty at his school as being "completely behind it" and described the reactions of the general student body as "either no reaction or positive reactions." Tim described his administrator as being neither "anti-support" nor "anti-club." However, Tim described his administrator as being primarily concerned that "because the word gay has so many negative connotations" his administrator "was afraid of community backlash."

Under the advisement and support of Tim, the students presented their proposal to the school's Site Based Council, which Tim described as being "kind of like a school advisory board that is made up of parents, teachers, and administrators and they decide ultimately what's allowed at the school and it's a very powerful group." The group turned down the request to form a GSA, stating, as per Tim, "It was too controversial a group to have in the school environment." The Site Based Council is a "microcosm of the larger community" in which the school is situated.

After the initial denial of the GSA, Tim's administrator approached him and suggested that they call the club something other than a Gay-Straight Alliance such as a "Teen Tolerance Club." Tim's initial reaction was one of disappointment, that he felt he was "compromising" the integrity of the club. Tim believed his administrator was supportive of the GSA and its mission and was, as Tim described, "just trying to avoid a controversy that could have literally closed off any services that those kids might be able to receive" and "avert the GSA being shut down right away" if it was pursued further. Tim was assured by his administrator that if the name was changed "we can do the same things; we can have the same activities."

Tim's "ultimate goal was to "let these kids know they have a safe place to go and they have an advocate on the faculty to help them so to me the name wasn't that important either as long as the services would be there." When Tim told the students, "they were hurt that they could not call it by its proper name and in their eyes it was a step down so to speak." When he explained to them "we can do the same things, we can have the same activities, and try to be community oriented in the school" and "once they

realized that the activities were not going to change they were fine with that and the name became less important to them."

The Site Based Council gave Tim and the students to form a "less controversial" group that called a "Teen Tolerance Club." Once the name was changed, no negative remarks or controversy over the club emerged from the community. Tim believes that the alternative name for the club was a "less threatening name" and believes that everyone involved was happy with the outcome.

Community characteristics

Tim describes his community as "very conservative" and mainly "Southern Baptist." He perceives the majority of the populace to have "fundamentalist views and conservative political leanings" about minority sexual orientations. Given that the Site Based Council "is a microcosm of our community" Tim "knew going in to the meeting that the GSA proposal would most likely be denied."

Changes over time

Tim is proud that the club is still "up and running" but the community itself is "slowly changing" in terms of "awareness and respect for diversity. We are still a very conservative community and with the strong presence of Southern Baptists and other fundamentalist churches, it's likely to remain conservative."

Recommendations

Based on his experience, Tim has several suggestions for school counselors who faced with a similar situation related to forming a GSA in their school. First, he recommends that students and club advisors "be willing to call the club something less controversial as long as the mission of the club still has the same support system." He

also advises taking it slow by doing a needs assessment first. This will provide a basis for the need of the GSA and show it will benefit the entire student body. Above all, Tim advises school counselors to be "that safe adult on campus who students that are questioning their sexuality can come" as well as "be a sounding board and support" for them.

Textural description: Fran

Background information

Fran is a 61-year-old heterosexual white female. Fran's face-to-face interview took place in a hotel lobby at the 2009 ACA National Conference. She learned about this study through a flyer describing the study that I distributed at the conference. Her highest degree completed is a Master's degree in counseling. She began her career as a school counselor "serendipitously" in that she was interested in applying for social work positions upon graduation. She was encouraged to apply for a school counseling position and obtained it. Fran said that she "fell into, fell in love with it," and after 36 years, has not left it. Fran is currently a school counselor at a private, independent school in a suburban area of a southern state. Politically she describes herself as a "moderate liberal."

Fran reports that she has earned "hundreds" of training hours on multicultural and diversity issues, saying, "every year in my professional training I've done something on diversity or multicultural issues." She reports 20 to 25 hours of course work or training on counseling people with minority sexual orientations.

Professional identity

Fran believes that advocating for students is "about 90%" of being a school counselor. Her role is "to make sure the kids are getting what they need and are being

heard and are being understood." As an advocate, Fran consults with teachers, plans programs, works with committees, and confers with parents regarding issues that may be affecting academic achievement. She provides responsive services, both individual and group, to students regarding personal growth and self-awareness and finds tremendous reward when she sees "that I've made a difference for somebody." In essence, Fran helps students "advocate for themselves" and she "advocates for them with parents and teachers."

Role of administrator

Fran describes her administrator as "personally very supportive of me, has a huge respect for me professionally, lets me know how much he values my input and expertise" but "doesn't really get the developmental aspect of the counseling program" therefore some of her training programs, such as 'leadership development for students,' have been cut. He is retiring this year therefore Fran is taking a proactive approach and for the newly hired administrator who will begin next year, she has typed up a list of things she does as a school counselor to help him understand the scope of her duties.

Perception of students with minority sexual orientations

Fran is aware of the specific issues that students from diverse or minority groups face regarding barriers to academic achievement. She views students with minority orientations as "an invisible, exceptional minority" in her school. These students are victims of "homophobic language, are often suicidal, and are often so scared of harassment and bullying that they do not come to school." Fran holds affirming views of people with minority orientations. She is a visible ally, having "developed a reputation over the years for being a safe person for our kids to come to."

Ethics

Fran is a former member of ASCA, switching her professional affiliation to the American Counseling Association (ACA), the flagship organization for community counselors. Fran made this switch recently, citing her work in an independent, private school setting rather than in a public school as her primary reason for this change. ACA also has very specific ethical guidelines for working with clients with minority orientations that are in concert with the ASCA standards regarding this population. Fran believes that she benefits more from ACA membership, as her school is not seeking to implement the ASCA national model and many of the federal regulations, as are public schools do not bind her school. Fran believes that "it is my responsibility to advocate for any student and we shouldn't be discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation. Those students need us probably more than any other student group."

Fran has been active in promoting a safe and affirming environment for students with minority orientations through faculty training on "addressing harassment and improving the school environment" for the students. She also addresses the consequences of homophobia with students by providing them with information and increasing their awareness and respect for students regardless of sexual orientation. In her guidance groups on health, she talks to students about respect for all people including people with minority sexual orientations.

Motivation to support a GSA

Because of her visibility as an affirming ally, a student who was struggling with issues related to his orientation sought out Fran. He was a top student that "postured so well and seemed so together" outwardly but was depressed and suicidal. He "came out"

to Fran and his family and Fran was instrumental in providing him and his family with support and referrals to affirming community agencies. As he grew more confident, he approached Fran with the idea of forming a GSA at the school. Fran agreed to support him and the GSA and "helped him go through the channels."

Fran, "pretty much knowing what the outcome would be," went to the administrator with the student to present the proposal for the GSA. Fran purposely did not alert the administrator beforehand that she and the student were going to approach him about starting a GSA, wanting to "put him on the spot" because she "did not want to give him time to carefully plan his responses." Fran believed this was the right thing to do at the time because she works in "the conservative south" in a private institution that is "tuition dependent" and in her mind, she was "being very careful" by keeping the efforts to form a GSA quiet. Fran believed that the school faculty was "all over the board" in their support of the GSA. Some did not believe there was a need for it; others did but recognized the politics involved.

Fran described her administrator as being "pissed off" that she had not given him "a head's up" about the GSA proposal. He told Fran and the student that the timing for the GSA wasn't right, the community was not ready for it, and there was no need for a GSA due to the existence of a "student's celebrating diversity group" that could deal with the issues the GSA sought to address. Fran describes the aftermath of the administrator's decision as being "a very painful time period for a number of us" and "detrimental" to her professionally, "in the eyes of the administration." Many teachers who were in support of the club were at odds with the administrator for denying the club and expressed their displeasure to him directly.

Community characteristics

Fran described her community as "being in the Bible belt" and "politically conservative." Fran described her community's attitudes and beliefs about minority sexual orientations as "homophobic at worst, patronizing at best." Fran's school is "tuition dependent" and the majority of the students in her school have parents who are politically conservative and some that are "religious fundamentalists."

Reaction/strategy

Since the student was not allowed to form the GSA at school, Fran helped him make a few announcements about an off campus support group for students with minority orientations and their allies. Fran's administrator told her "unequivocally not to have my name associated with the group" nor allow the student to make any more announcements. This infuriated Fran as she was already very "concerned about the message to other gay kids who were not out" were receiving. She confronted her administrator, believing that he was allowing "ultra conservative parents" the "power to make decisions" for the school. Her administrator replied that he had to respect that constituency, given they are a tuition dependent school. Fran believes that her administrator thought he had made a satisfactory compromise by allowing minority orientations to be a part of the celebrating diversity club.

Fran's primary reaction to the GSA ban was frustration. She understands "the politics of the situation" is "a reality we have to deal with." This incident led Fran to question, "Am I in the right place? Is this the right environment for me to work in and then I turn around and go, yes, this is an environment that needs my voice. You know, I

serve a purpose here but also recognizing that I have to be careful how I do it so that I am a respected voice so that I don't damage the cause."

Changes over time

Since this incident, Fran reports that the level of awareness regarding the school experience of students with minority orientations has increased in that it "raised the level of dialogue about the needs of our gay kids in the school and in the community." She continues to be frustrated that the "minority voice of the very ultra conservative has the power to make decisions for us" and at the "snail's pace of change" regarding acceptance of minority orientations in the larger community. Fran perceives that the "younger generation is more accepting" and that the community is taking "baby steps" toward being more "accepting." Fran has noticed more teachers "having safe place stickers" displayed in their classrooms and the there has been a concerted effort by faculty and staff to "eliminate" of homophobic remarks in the classroom.

Recommendations

Based on her experience, Fran has suggestions for school counselors faced with a similar situation related to forming a GSA. First, she recommends preparing the administrator before presenting a formal proposal for the GSA, particularly if the politics of your area will create resistance to its formation in the school. Fran suggests that preparation in this manner includes providing information about the experiences of students with minority orientations, knowing the "temperature" of the community regarding attitudes toward supportive services for people with minority orientations and what, if any, services are available to them in the community. Finally, she suggests "creating a network of faculty who are allies so that the kids know that they don't need to

be invisible, that they are safe, that there are people who will have their backs regardless of what happens policy wise from higher up."

Textural description: Lisa

Background information

Lisa is a 59-year-old heterosexual white female. Her highest degree completed is a Master's degree in school counseling. She has also completed the course work toward a doctorate in counselor education. She began her career as a teacher. Six years into her profession, she "realized she enjoyed working more one-on-one with students" and entered a Master's in Counseling program. After she completed her graduate training, she became a school counselor. Eight years ago, she was promoted to an administrative position as a coordinator of all the counselors in her school district. Her school district is in an urban area in the capital city of a Midwestern state. She is also an adjunct instructor for a counselor education program at a local university. Politically, Lisa describes herself as "very liberal."

Lisa "couldn't begin to tell" me how many multicultural training hours she has undertaken. She seeks out this type training is herself a trainer of diversity issues by a nationally recognized civil rights organization. A "ballpark is 100 hours" by her estimation. Lisa reports that when she was in graduate school, her faculty infused multicultural and diversity issues throughout her curriculum. "I've been in this business a long time" and multicultural and diversity issues have "been woven through all of my professional development" she explains. Lisa estimates that she has undertake at least 25 hours of training in issues specific to minority sexual orientations. As a counselor educator, she infuses information about counseling people with minority orientations

throughout the course she teaches. As a school counseling administrator, she takes the lead in advocating for inclusion of sexual orientation in all of her school district's policies.

Professional identity

Lisa believes that student advocacy is "probably the most important thing that I do" because "if I'm not doing that then I'm not doing my job." She describes advocacy as "the fabric that we are woven out of and if we are not there for that then we shouldn't be doing the job." Advocacy is an area she is "very passionate about" and she believes that school counselors have a "more global sense of what the school is all about in terms of the heartbeat of the school and the real issues of the kids. I think we have such important work to do and there are not enough of us to go around."

Role of administration

Lisa describes the administrators in her district as "pretty enlightened" but "that isn't to say that they don't from time to time misuse the counselors but I think they are pretty aware of what counselors should be doing." She is involved in ensuring that administrators who are new to the district receive training regarding the role of the school counselor. The result is a school counseling staff that is "well integrated and accepted and utilized."

Perception of students with minority sexual orientations

Lisa is aware of the specific issues that minority populations face regarding academic achievement. She views students with minority sexual orientations as academically at risk due to issues such as "lack of support in school, being afraid at school and suicidal tendencies regarding lack of acceptance." To Lisa, students with

minority orientations "need us just as much and in some cases more than others do." Lisa believes that if a school counselor "knew a student was LGBT and chose not to support them because his or her value system would run contrary to that, to me that's unethical and we have to check those things at the door"

As an administrator and former school counselor, Lisa holds affirming views of students and adults with minority sexual orientations. In her private life, she reports, "one thing that makes me the most passionate is having a really good friend who is lesbian. I think over the years it has made me realize that she was a gift in my life, she meant so much to me and made me grow, made me stronger." Further, she explains, "We are afraid of what we don't know" and due to her early friendship and openness, she "learned early on that there was nothing to be afraid of."

In her professional life, Lisa recalls a gay student she worked with: "He taught me a lot. That was the first time I had worked with a student who came out and I was the first person who he had came out to. It was a long time ago and I can still see his face. It was pretty impactful." Lisa's motivation to advocate for students with minority orientations stems from her professional encounters wherein she witnessed, "far too many LGBT students get hurt over the years and I am sick and tired of it. I have never stood by and tolerated that and the hardest thing for me to swallow in my job day to day when I work in the school or in the office is to watch people treated unfairly. I can't stand it and it's just a passion for me."

Ethics

Lisa is also a member of ASCA and strives to adhere to the ethics that ASCA has explicated regarding advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations. In terms of

responsive services for students with minority orientations, Lisa believes ASCA mandates "that we show them the support and advocacy that we would for any student, that we shouldn't be discriminating in what we offer students and how we support them." She further states that it is unethical to choose not to support them because one's "value system would run contrary to that; we have to check those things at the door."

In terms of teaching, training, and consultation, Lisa adheres to the ASCA standards regarding students with minority orientations by including minority sexual orientation issues in lesson plans and curriculum. She also partners with a national social justice agency that provides diversity training for students and staff and ensures that issues related to minority sexual orientations is included in this training. This is difficult for Lisa because, she reports, "I have been cautioned by the people above me that we need to be very, very careful about specifically mentioning LGBT's in our lesson plans." For her it is a "delicate line to walk because I think we need to call it what it is and to me, when you can't come right out and call it what it is that kids won't know what you are talking about."

Community characteristics. Lisa described her community as "extremely conservative," its majority populace gets "behind these incredibly conservative legislators," and "that speaks loudly about where the heads are of a lot of people in the community." The majority religious denomination in her community and state is "Mormon LDS" and the community's majority beliefs about sexual orientation are that "homosexual behavior is a sin."

Reaction/Strategy

Eight years ago, Lisa began work as a school counselor at a high school that had within the last several months prior to her employment experienced a good deal of controversy after students tried to form a GSA in the school. The community outcry against the GSA was so powerful that the school board elected to ban all non-curricular clubs in an effort to prevent the GSA from forming. Lisa was aware of this and told the administrator who hired her that she was "intrigued" and, while the school board in her opinion was being "crazy" and "punitive," she perceived his response in the media to the controversy as "very compassionate" and "very fair with the students." She believed, because of the administrator's reaction, the school was "a place I wanted to work because it sounds like a pretty respectful environment at the school level."

Lisa went to work at the school during what she describes as a "very chaotic and disturbing time."

> It was a time when those kids needed us more than ever. They needed us as counselors more than ever. They needed all the adults in that building to support and care for them more than ever. They needed other students to accept them more than ever. It was very destructive. I became a safe haven for these students but I had to be careful about how far I went. At that time, there was a gag order placed by the school board down to the district and school administration to keep LGBT issues under the radar. There were two teachers in our school who were open about their sexuality, one gay and one lesbian, and they realized that we were gay friendly, I and another female counselor. The male counselors were not so, I hate to sound bitter about this but they were not, they kept telling us we were

> going to get into trouble. Anyway, these two teachers gave us a rainbow symbol that would indicate we were friendly. They asked us if we would be willing to post that on our bulletin board because supposedly all the kids at the school, especially the LGBT students knew what that meant. We said sure, no problem. Therefore, I realize I could have gotten in trouble for it. I told my administrator that it was there and he said he did not care, leave it there. He said he wanted these kids to know that they have someone they can come and talk to and who better than the counselors."

During the aftermath of the GSA ban, there were incidents during which the straight kids were "pitted against the LGBT kids." For example, during an assembly about a year after the GSA ban, some LGBT students put together a power point presentation for diversity day. The language and tone of the power point was "anger" and "presented with a raised fist" therefore "the kids were really up in arms and once again this monster that rose its ugly head and we had the straight kids against the gay kids and it just got ugly all over again. Our parent community once again became unglued."

Lisa, due to her affirming attitudes, and status as a "safe haven" for the LGBT students during these difficult times was able to be "open with them about what was going on." For a while after the GSA ban, Lisa sensed that the LGBT students believed most students and staff at the school did not care about what they went through nor had they ever been given a chance to talk about how the GSA ban made them feel; hence, the anger and defensiveness from the LGBT students.

While Lisa was able to "be there" and "be a safe haven" for the LGBT students, there was no venue available to discuss the larger impact of the GSA ban within the

school across neither networks nor the community at large. To Lisa, although she "could not have come in to that school at a worse time to step forward, the kids knew that I was there for them to always listen and support them." However, "how far" she could go with advocating for LGBT students and their needs was "politically precarious."

Lisa believed that her administrator at the time, who has since retired, got caught in the middle of the controversy. He wanted to support the students that wanted to form the GSA but had to comply with the decision of the school board. Lisa believed that the faculty thought the school board's decision to ban all clubs was "ridiculous" and the general attitude towards the school board's decision was that all students were being "punished" in some way and banning all clubs was not "student friendly" or "respectful." Lisa describes the incident as "monster" that continues to "rear its ugly head" because no one is allowed to talk directly about LGBT student issues.

Changes over time

Though taking several years, the school board reinstated student clubs. However, there are no GSA's in any of the district's schools. The school policy was re-written so that any club that could exist had to be able to justify a connection to the school curriculum. Even now, the school board and administration is "incredibly conservative" and the chances of students being able to sit down with administrators to talk about a GSA are very slim. Lisa, while "being very careful," continues to be a visible ally for these students.

Lisa concedes that there have been some changes in the larger community, especially in the metropolitan area of her state. She has observed the population in the metropolitan areas to be experiencing a shift from being predominantly religious and

conservative to being more secular and liberal. The changes though, "have come way slower than I'd like for them to."

Recommendations

Lisa urges school counselors to "step up" and "let the people who are in power know if you think that these students or any group is being minimized." Lisa believes that counselors should "promote an atmosphere of respect in the school for *all* students. That would be the best advice I can give. If they really believe the GSA needs to happen and it needs to exist in their school building then they need to figure out a way to help that effort along. They also need to know when they are fighting a losing battle too, at the expense of the kids. Sometimes the kids get so hurt in all of this. However, at the same time if the kids are so passionate about it and you have given them all the caution and fore warning out of a nature to protect them, and they still want to go ahead, then you be there for them and you catch them when they fall. You be there to listen."

Composite textural description

Several contextual similarities and differences influence the participants' experience of the GSA ban. Four participants work in a public school setting and one works in a private school setting. Three worked directly with the students that wanted to form the GSA while one worked indirectly with them through consultation with the faculty advisor for the club. Another began working at her school after the GSA ban. The overarching contextual similarity between the participants is that they primarily experienced the GSA ban as a reproduction of their larger communities' status quo beliefs about sexual orientation.

Participants described their communities as politically conservative and religiously fundamentalist on the issue of sexual orientation. They experienced the pervasive conservative and fundamental ideologies held by the majority populace as welding a lot of power over allowing supportive services for students with minority orientations. The participants experienced a general sense of powerlessness against these majority views and described their own views of minority sexual orientations as politically moderate or liberal and affirming. The participants have participated in training and continued education regarding minority sexual orientations.

The participants described their primary role, as a school counselor, is to advocate for students. Their actions across networks within the school environment are expressively to benefit students in terms of their academic achievement. The participants view students with minority sexual orientations as academically at risk and they expressed an understanding of their ethical obligation to advocate for them.
The participants believed that the inclusion of a GSA in their school would benefit students.

Participants also described their administrators' role as primarily to provide them with support and resources needed to perform optimally in their role as student advocates. However, due to the GSA bans, support for their advocacy for students with minority orientations experienced as being limited or non-existent. Four participants perceived their administrators as acting to avoid controversy with conservative parent or community groups. One participant perceived his administrator as being in collusion with conservative parent or community groups.

The primary initial reaction of four participants to the ban was lack of surprise. Each entered the proposal stage believing that it was unlikely that the administration would approve the GSA. For the participant who entered the school just after the ban, the primary reaction was anger due to the community's lack of concern about how a district wide ban on all clubs would have ramifications affecting the academic and social experience of all students. The emotion woven throughout the participants' experience in the aftermath of the ban was frustration. All of the participants except but one made and continue to make efforts to resist the reproduction of status quo oppressive community beliefs about sexual orientation.

Three of these participants now hold administrative positions and they use their positions to weave issues related to advocating for students with minority sexual orientations into their training and consultation with school counselors, faculty, and staff. Two of these also have part-time positions as counselor educators and infuse issues related to minority sexual orientations in their classrooms. The other is remains a school counselor and she provides training about the needs of these students to the general student boy, faculty, and staff. Regarding the GSA ban, the participants utilized different strategies to cope with it, based on their perceptions of their administrators.

The participants emerged from the experience with an understanding that proactive versus reactive advocacy for the inclusion of a GSA and other services for students is best practice and is not without some professional risk, especially in conservative areas. The consensus among participants is that their communities, while remaining primarily politically conservative and religiously fundamental, the visibility of people with minority sexual orientations and awareness of their issues, particularly the

issues of students with these orientations, have increased. There is also a consensus that discrimination against people with minority sexual orientations continues and will until there is acceptance in the larger community of minority sexual orientations. The participants are optimistic that that the direction of change will continue to be positive but that the advent of these changes will be slow.

Structural Description: Bob

The primary structure of Bob's experience is *relation to self* as is exemplified in his strong professional and personal identity as a student advocate. For Bob, student advocate is what he "*is*" and the professional is not separate from the personal. Therefore his professional and personal ethics regarding what a student advocate does, which is to "advocate for *all* students" is the foundation for his relation to others (students with minority sexual orientations and his administrator), to space (his community), and to time (past and current issues related to advocacy for students with minority orientations). The theme of "the professional is personal" weaves throughout Bob's narrative.

Relation to students with minority sexual orientations. Bob predicates his advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations on his belief that theses students have needs that warrant advocacy within the school environment. Bob perceives these students as at risk academically due to both internal and external barriers, both of which are because of external conditions such as "lack of support in their home, school, and community environments." For Bob though, the recognition of the barriers and advocacy for their removal runs deeper than the obvious. Bob empathizes with the students therefore his relation to these students is not merely going through the motions of advocacy, but connecting with their needs on a deeper, personal level.

Bob's relation to students with minority sexual orientations has depth as illustrated by his reaction to his experience with these students in a counseling relationship. Bob saw firsthand that some of these students can be "in a pretty bad space" due to depression and suicidal ideation and they "struggle," particularly in environments that "had not paid much attention to their needs." His relation to them was also predisposed and deepened by his personal connections with "friends and acquaintances" that exposed him to their experience as a marginalized population.

Bob's identity as a student advocate coupled with his awareness of the needs of students with minority orientations and underscored by his affirming views of minority orientations motivated him to support the inclusion of a GSA in his school. The students viewed him as someone that would support it as evidenced by their approaching him to assist him in forming the GSA. This further solidifies his relation to these students as an affirming and willing advocate, in spite of being "concerned" that his administrator would not support it.

Relation to administration. Bob's relation to his administrator at the time of the GSA ban was adversarial one this issue. Ideally, Bob believes that administrators trust that their school counselors are "competent professionals" and will provide them with the necessary means to do "what is best for students" as long as whatever is being done is "within ethical guidelines." Here is where the issue became complicated for Bob. Bob is a member of ASCA, which has clear ethical mandates about advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations. He considers it "his job" to "reinforce" these ethics in the school environment. In advocating for and supporting the inclusion of a GSA in his school, Bob was acting within his ethical guidelines. However, Bob was concerned going

into the proposal stage of the GSA because his administrator was "a Mormon Bishop who held traditional LDS views about sexual orientation. He is the person who blocked the inclusion of a support group as part of our group counseling program."

Relation to space. Bob's relation to space is crucial to understanding his reactions and strategies regarding his administrator's decision to ban the GSA. Recall that Bob identified his political beliefs as "liberal." Bob's descriptions of his community reveal that his community's majority political beliefs are conservative. Bob perceived his community's conservative political beliefs as aligned with the community's majority religious beliefs about sexual orientation as evidenced by his community's "Republican legislators who have a history of voting against equality measures" for citizens with minority sexual orientations and the community's majority religious sentiment espoused by evangelical Christian parishioners. Therefore, Bob believed that pursuing the GSA would have been a "battle" especially given his administrator's alignment with the community's beliefs about sexual orientation.

The imagery of battle implies power, force, the taking of sides with only one emerging as the winner. There is the sense that at the time, Bob understood that while he had the passion, he believed he was ill prepared to "battle" successfully. The imagery of battle also implies attack, defeat, casualties, retreat, surrender, and so on. Bob may have surrendered to the notion that fighting for the GSA within the school environment was, in essence, a battle he could not win but he did not retreat from the notion that a GSA would benefit students. Recalling that Bob's identity as a student advocate permeates his sense of being surrender was not an option. While Bob may have felt powerless within the school environment, he did have the resources to create an alternative location for the

GSA in the community. Bob's strategy was to remove himself from the battlefield, so to speak, by using his professional status as a licensed professional counselor to create a community GSA that in effect was open to not only students at his school, but students attending other schools as well.

It is interesting that Bob felt more assured of his position as an advocate for students with minority sexual orientations as a community counselor rather than as a school counselor, which was his primary profession at the time. After all, he was providing the service in the same community, just in a different setting. This speaks to his understanding of the political nature of schools as institutions that reflect majority community values and norms. Bob seemed well aware of the power embedded within the community to influence what is available for students while at school.

Relation to time. Bob's relation to time is evident in his reflections on what he does in the present to advocate for students with minority sexual orientations based on what he has learned from his past efforts. Bob believes that school counselors have an arsenal (if you will) to engage in "battle" for the inclusion of a GSA in the school environment. Bob recommends engaging "the opposition" from a legal rather than a moral stance utilizing the *Equal Access Act,* networking with allies in the community, and partnering with local, regional, and national civil rights organizations.

In his current professional capacity as a school counseling administrator, he provides his supervisees with in-service training and presents at national school counseling conferences on effectively addressing the issues of students with minority sexual orientations. Bob, once retreating from it, is now a soldier on the front lines, providing information to school counselors regarding how to engage in "battle" for

students with minority sexual orientations. Bob is encouraged by the presence of a number of GSAs in schools throughout his state and the willingness of more school counselors and faculty to work affirmatively with students with minority orientations.

He is at the same time discouraged and laments that while there has been progress, the power of both lower and upper level education administrators to reproduce community non-affirming attitudes and beliefs about minority sexual orientations remains. To illustrate, Bob reported that "despite the fact that GSA's are now present in that district's high schools, that district's superintendent recently prohibited one of the local high school's plans to present *The Laramie Project* as a school play." Bob is aware that discrimination in the larger culture also prevents many of his adult friends from being "out in their public lives and I am sad that many of those people, many of whom are my friends, feel the need to be cautious and protective of their identities." He interprets this as a "loss" for students with minority sexual orientations. Bob believes that their struggles would ease if they had access to "positive role models in the community."

Bob believes that minority sexual orientations need to be "normalized" in the larger culture. This thought leaves him to hope "that one day supportive services for these students are just one of the many services we provide for students with issues that are getting in the way of being emotionally healthy and being successful students." For Bob, the battle lines are clear and the side he is on, professionally and personally, is gaining "slowly" gaining strength and momentum.

Structural Description: Jill

The primary structure to emerge for Jill was *relation to others*, primarily her administrator. Jill, more than any other participant, had a strongly internalized conception

of her administrator as all powerful, doing "whatever he wants." Jill felt powerless, having "no control" over what he directs his staff do and "everything that happens or does not happen in schools is up to the administrator." Jill's relation to her administrator is the foundation for her relation to self, relation to time, relation to students with minority orientations, and relation to space. Woven throughout Jill's narrative is the theme "I am limited."

Relation to administration. Ideally, Jill perceives the role of her administrator as one who provides support and resources "to do her job." In reality, Jill perceives her administrator as making decisions about her role to suit his own purposes. At this time counseling is not considered by him a "priority," therefore her duties are "split between counseling and teaching." Her central administration's lack of influence over her school administrator in terms of the proper role of a school counselor reinforced Jill's sense of powerlessness.

Believing her role as a school counselor diminished and that she was powerless over administrative directives, Jill's experience with a GSA ban was yet another example of her administrator "doing whatever he wants." This is exemplified in her statement "no other students have wanted to form a GSA and I would be supportive but I don't think my principal has changed his mind" revealing again that her relation to her administrator is the primary structure that influenced her experience.

Relation to self and time. Jill's relation to self intersects with her relation to time. Her inability to "do the job she was trained to do" compromises her professional identity. Her administrator diminishes her professional identity as a school counselor, while she highly values it internally and externally. Jill's dual role as a teacher/counselor "limits her

time" to act as a student advocate, which she describes as her primary role. Jill experiences this role as rewarding and believes that as a school counselor she plays a "vital role" by addressing the needs of all students. Being an advocate, to Jill, means "working with students" and having limits placed on her time to do so have left her feeling disempowered in that she "just doesn't have the time to really have a good handle on what's going on with students."

Relation to students with minority sexual orientations. Jill's diminished capacity to perform in her role of school counselor compromises her relation to students with minority sexual orientations. Jill is aware of the specific barriers within the school environment that make this student population academically at risk. However, she appears to have limited awareness of how these issues manifest in her school environment. She made limited efforts to reach out to these students as indicated by her belief that "we have gay and lesbian students that are not out" and "it's been a while, since I've seen a kid with those issues." Her relation to these students also intersects with her relation to her administrator as evidenced by his beliefs that students with minority orientations in his school are "better able to deal with those issues in high school so they can wait and participate in a GSA when they get to high school."

Jill's attitudes and beliefs about minority orientations indicate that she is affirming and supportive. Jill advocates that minority orientations be "normalized." She also finds it offensive that people are "judged" by their sexual orientation and she has made efforts to ensure that students know that she is a "safe person" by displaying a "safe zone" sticker in her office. However, her ability to be that safe person is limited given that she is unavailable to see students. If Jill were able to "devote the time necessary to

advocate" perhaps she would feel empowered enough be more proactive in her advocacy for her students. Jill is aware and visible, but unavailable for students.

Her efforts to assist students and their advisor in starting a GSA were confined to ensuring the advisor that the "students had a right to the club." Jill is knowledgeable about the legal aspects of forming a GSA, which supports her relation to students with minority orientations as a secondary structure influencing her experience of the GSA ban. Her relation to her administrator as the primary structure of her experience is exemplified by her lack of surprise at his decision to block the inclusion of a GSA and perception that he had "made up his mind" and was "not likely to change it." As a result, Jill believed that any further efforts to have a GSA in the school would have been futile. Jill acknowledges that ethically she is responsible for making sure students with minority orientations are "treated equally, not being discriminated against." However, in the instance of the GSA ban, surrendered to the directives of her administrator and "just let it go."

Relation to space. Jill's relation to space contributes in a minor way to her experience of the GSA ban. Jill's community is "conservative" and while there is a GSA in a high school in her community, Jill's administrator believed the parents "would have a fit" if there was one attempted in their school. Jill describes her political orientation as moderate and describes her community's political conservative power structure as being intertwined with its religious structures as exemplified by her statement: "We have a number of evangelical or fundamentalist Christian churches here that are very active in the community. Many of our local politicians and elected officials are members of these type churches. Most people here are just not progressive in their thinking, especially

when it comes to sexual orientation." Jill perceived her administrator's decision to deny the GSA as an attempting to avoid controversy with these community structures.

Relation to time. Jill reveals her relation to time in her reflections on changes in her community for people with minority sexual orientations. She perceives her community as "slowly changing" in terms of visibility for minority orientations and it is interesting that she perceives them as being "empowered to advocate for themselves." Her current recommendations for others based on her experience continue to reveal her relation to her administrator as being the primary structure to influence her experience.

First, she would determine a number of things such, the motivation of the students who wanted to form the club, the need for the GSA, and the level of interest in overall school environment. She also suggests arranging a meeting with students and sponsors from schools with established GSAs to determine what to expect from a GSA and how a GSA has benefitted the overall school environment. After determinations, then approach the administrator with the request, showing from them that a GSA "is not as controversial as it may seem to be."

Structural description: Tim

The primary structure influencing Tim's experience is *relation to self* as exemplified in his strong professional identification as a student advocate. For Tim, being a student advocate involves consciously basing "all decisions on what is best for students." He reported that his "mantra" is "how will this decision benefit students?" His "mantra" is the foundation for his relation to others, to space, and time. The theme woven throughout his narrative is "my litmus test is: How will this action benefit students?"

Relation to students with minority sexual orientations. Tim believes that students with minority sexual orientations are an at-risk student population due to internal and external factors. He believes that homophobia and homo-negativity creates hostile conditions in the environment such as "bullying, discrimination, and rejection from family" and makes students with minority sexual orientations "feel like outcasts." Tim's empathy for "what these students have to go through" has become a "passion" for him. Further, as an ASCA member, he highlights the ethical mandate that his actions as a school counselor work to make the school environment "inclusive and respecting the rights of all students."

Tim reveals his "passion" for the needs of students with minority sexual through his statement regarding that these students "know that they have a firm advocate in a building who will listen to them, not judge them, and make them feel like they are welcome. They know I am a compassionate and empathetic listener, I'm not judgmental, and I don't discuss with their parents anything they tell me unless it of course involves harm to themselves or others." Tim's relation to students with minority sexual orientations was predisposed by his deep personal relationship with a gay family member who Tim considers "very influential" in terms of his affirming attitudes and beliefs about minority sexual orientations.

Tim's decision to assist the students in forming the GSA was made due to his belief "most high schools need that supportive service" and having one would benefit students by helping them "feel more comfortable" plus "feel like that had a niche in school." Tim perceived the school's faculty as "being completely behind it" and the general student body as reacting neither positively or negatively to its inclusion. He

perceived his administrator as neutral but primarily concerned about "community backlash "because the word gay has so many negative connotations." For this reason, Tim believed the proposal for the GSA would not be accepted.

Relation to administration. Tim's relation to his administrator at the time of the GSA ban was collaborative on this issue. Ideally, Tim believes that administrators treat school counselors as "true professionals" and does not interfere other than to supply them with "whatever we need in the counseling department in terms of resources." Yet, Tim understands that as a subordinate "some decisions are made for me at a higher level." The "higher level" in this instance was the school's "Site Based Council" which was described by Tim as " like a school advisory board that is made up of parents, teachers, and administrators and they decide ultimately what's allowed at the school and it's a very powerful group" and a "microcosm of the larger community." The Site Based Council denied the GSA because it "was too controversial a group."

Relation to space. Tim's relation to space is critical to understanding his reactions and strategies regarding the Site Based Council's decision. Tim identified his political beliefs as "moderate" and his larger community's beliefs as "conservative." Tim suggests the community bases its attitudes and beliefs about sexual orientation in "religious fundamentalism." He described the Site Based Council as "powerful" and a "microcosm" of the larger community. This illustrates that Tim has an understanding of the political nature of schools as reproducing the status quo beliefs of the larger community. Tim's beliefs about minority sexual orientations are positive and affirming. Tim was "not surprised" that the GSA was denied by the Site Based Council. Tim's administrator was also prepared for the denial but instead of "closing off any services for these students," he

approached Tim brokering a compromise between the students and the council to "change the name to something less controversial."

At first, Tim believed that a compromise would endanger the integrity of the GSA and its mission. The students felt "let down and hurt" that they could not use the word "gay." Tim brokered from his administrator assurances that the mission of the GSA would remain and the services provided by the GSA would not be diluted in any way. He discussed the name change with the students, deciding to call the club the "Teen Tolerance Club" instead of a GSA. The compromise passed Tim's litmus test in that his "ultimate goal was to let these kids know they have a safe place to go and they have an advocate on the faculty to help them so to me the name wasn't that important either as long as the services would be there." Pursuing the GSA intact would have "closed off these services" therefore Tim believed his strategy of compromise to be one that would "benefit students."

Relation to time. Tim reveals his relation to time in his sense of pride that the student club is "still up and running." Conversely, he experiences his community "slowly changing" in terms of "awareness and respect for diversity." His recommendations for other school counselors also demonstrate that he reflected on his experience. His foremost recommendation was to be willing to be "that safe person on campus" for students with minority orientations. In terms of creating supportive services, he recommends doing a needs assessment, and taking things "slow." He also believes that a compromise as long as it will benefit students, is often necessary. In his current role as assistant administrator, in addition to promoting inclusion and respect for students with

minority sexual orientations, he leads a seminar for school counselors and faculty on how to counsel and advocate for this student population.

Structural description: Fran

The primary structure of Fran's experience was her *relation to self.* Her professional identity as a school counselor is "90%" student advocacy. Fran believes it is her job to "to make sure the kids are getting what they need and are being heard and are being understood." As an advocate, she strives "to make a difference" through advocacy or teaching students "to advocate for themselves." Fran "fell into counseling" and "fell in love with it." The theme woven throughout Fran's narrative is "I am a voice for students." Being this "voice" provides the foundation for her relation to others, relation to space, and relation to time.

Relation to students with minority sexual orientations. Fran views students with minority sexual orientations as "an invisible exceptional minority" that are often victims of "homophobic language, are often suicidal, and are often so scared of harassment and bullying that they do not come to school." Ethically, Fran believes that "it is my responsibility to advocate for any student and we shouldn't be discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation. Those students need us probably more than any other student group." She is an empathic visible ally, having "developed a reputation over the years for being a safe person for our kids to come to." As a result of her visibility, Fran shared one of her student's "journey" from being "suicidal" because of external issues related to his sexual orientation to becoming empowered enough to want to start a GSA in the school. In order to understand Fran's decisions about how she assisted this student, it is important

first to understand Fran in terms of her relation to her community and her relation to her administrator.

Relation to community. Fran described her political beliefs as moderate to liberal and her views of minority sexual orientations are positive and affirming. In contrast, her community's political structure is conservative and the pervasive beliefs about minority sexual orientations in the community are "homophobic at worst, patronizing at best." Therefore given that her school is located in a community in the "Bible belt" and it is "tuition dependent" Fran keep the efforts to form the GSA "quiet." This indicates that Fran was aware of the "politics of the situation" and that parents do have "the power to make decisions for the school.

Relation to administration. Fran believes that her administrator is "personally very supportive" of her and "values" her input. Fran's decision not to give her administrator a "head's up" prior to the student proposing the GSA had more to do with the community characteristics than her relationship with her administrator. In fact, she assisted the student with the proposal in spite of "pretty much knowing what the outcome would be." Her primary motivation in supporting the student was to show the student that she "had his back." Fran's administrator, as she expected, did not allow the GSA to form in essence because of the schools' financial dependency on a constituency of conservative parents.

Fran's administrator believed that "the time was not right" nor was the community "ready for it." Her administrator also believed that there was no need for a GSA due to the existence of a celebrating diversity group that could "deal with the issues." Fran realized that her administrator was "not getting it, not understanding how

hard it is for this population." However, on the other hand, Fran could also relate to "where he was coming from because we are tuition dependent."

Fran assisted the student in finding a support group in a nearby city and gave him permission to distribute an announcement throughout the school about the group and to put her down as the contact person for more information. Her administrator essentially forbade the student from disseminating the information and forbade her to have her name associated with it. Fran voiced her opinion to him that he "allows a vocal minority decide school policies," that he "does not set them straight on that, and that she "was very concerned about the message being sent to gay kids who were not out." Fran, more than any other participant, voiced her concern to her administrator that reproducing status quo beliefs about minority sexual orientations in the school environment was harmful to students. Even so, Fran recognizes that she "walks a fine line" and that I need to be a respected voice so that I don't damage the cause"

Relation to time. Fran illustrates her relation to time in her depiction of positive changes for people with minority sexual orientations in her community as occurring "at a snail's pace" or in "baby steps." Her recommendations for others also indicate that she reflected on her past. She recommends preparing you administrator before presenting a GSA, particularly if you are in a politically precarious position. She encourages taking the political "temperature" of your community and researching available resources for student with minority orientations. In addition she advocates "creating a network of faculty who are allies so that the kids know that they don't need to be invisible, that they are safe, that there are people who will have their backs regardless of what happens policy wise from higher up."

Currently, Fran advocates for students with minority sexual orientations through faculty training on "addressing harassment and improving the school environment" for the students. She also addresses the consequences of homophobia with students by providing them with information and increasing their awareness and respect for students regardless of sexual orientation. In her guidance groups on health, she talks to students about respect for all people regardless of sexual orientation. Fran is using her position to be a voice for these students.

Structural description: Lisa

The structure that appears most relevant to Lisa's experience of the GSA ban was her relation to space. Lisa is aware that the reproduction of community status quo community beliefs about minority sexual orientations in her school environment is to such a degree that issues related to sexual orientation in the school are like a "herd of elephants in the room." Her experience began when she went to work in a school district that had recently banned all student clubs just to prevent a GSA from forming in any of the district's schools. The level of oppression was such that she was cautioned to be "very, very careful" about "specifically mentioning" minority sexual orientations while performing her duties. For Lisa this was a "delicate line to walk because I think we need to call it what it is and to me, when you can't come right out and call it what it is that kids won't know what you are talking about." Lisa does mention these issues and the theme of "covert operator" emerged in her narrative. Understanding Lisa's relation to space is necessary to understand her relation to self, to others, and to time.

Relation to space. Politically Lisa describes herself as "very liberal" and her attitudes and beliefs about minority sexual orientations are positive and affirming. In

stark contrast, her community is "extremely conservative" and the majority belief about homosexuality is a religious view that homosexual behavior is a sin. The community power structures are rooted in Republican politics and traditional Mormon religious beliefs. The idea of having a GSA in one of the community's schools was so disturbing to the general populace that there was a "powerful outcry" mobilizing the community to induce the school board to take the drastic step of banning all student clubs just to keep a GSA from forming. Lisa realized how "politically precarious" it would be for her to fulfill her ethical obligations to advocate for students with minority sexual orientations in such an environment as evidenced by her belief that these students "get marginalized far too often, especially in really conservative communities." Lisa's relation to space intersects her relation to self and to students with minority sexual orientations.

Relation to self. "Advocacy is the fabric that we are woven out of and if we are not there for that then we shouldn't be doing the job." This statement illustrates Lisa strong professional identity as a student advocate. Lisa believes that school counselors are in the best position to advocate because they have a "global sense of what the school is all about in terms of the heartbeat of the school and the real issues of the kids."

Relation to students with minority orientations. Lisa affirms and values minority sexual orientations. She "learned early on that there was nothing to be afraid of" and she considers her relationship with her best friend, who is lesbian, a "gift." Lisa mirrors these personal attitudes in her professional life due to her recollections of the first student who "came out" to her. She is "most passionate" about the issues of this population and "the hardest thing for me to swallow in my job day to day when I work in the school or in the office is to watch people be treated unfairly."

Lisa believes that students with minority sexual orientations are academically at risk. Among the conditions that put them at risk are factors in the school such as "lack of support and lack of acceptance." Lisa also believes that these students "need us just as much and in some cases more than others do." From an ethical perspective, Lisa believes ASCA mandates "that we show them the support and advocacy that we would for any student, that we shouldn't be discriminating in what we offer students and how we support them." She further states that it is unethical to choose not to support them because one's "value system would run contrary to that; we have to check those things at the door."

Relation to administration. Lisa's relation to her administration during the aftermath of the GSA ban was one of mutual support. Lisa empathized with him, perceiving him to have been supportive of the GSA. Lisa perceived him as "hurt" that the students were not allowed to have a club that they "needed." Lisa "respected him" and informed him that she was ensuring that the students knew she was an ally but that if it "were to cause more trouble for the school" she would remove her safe zone symbol. Her administrator encouraged Lisa to do what she needed to do to let the students know that they had someone and "who better than the counselors."

Relation to time. Lisa reflected on the changes in her community since the GSA ban. The school board reinstated clubs but there are still no GSAs in any of the district schools. The policy on student clubs was re-written so that one can only exist if justified by a connection to school curriculum. The student at the center of the GSA ban at Lisa's school is part of a documentary film about the history of gay rights. There has been a population shift in the urban area of Lisa's school district indicating that it is becoming

less religious and conservative to being more secular and liberal. However, for Lisa, these changes are coming "way slower than I'd like them to be."

Lisa's recommendations to other school counselors reveal that she reflected on her experience. Her primary concern is that no efforts be made at "the expense of the kids" but if they are "so passionate about it and you've given them all the caution and fore warning out of a nature to protect them, and they still want to go ahead, then you be there for them and you catch them when they fall. You be there to listen." In her current position as an administrator and part-time counselor educator, Lisa advocates to the inclusion of sexual orientation in all of her district's policies, reminds her staff that sexual orientation is included in the meaning of diversity, and infuses information about counseling people with minority orientations throughout the course she teaches.

Composite structural description

The political and religious power structures in the participants' communities are conservative Republican and evangelical Christianity. The status quo beliefs about minority sexual orientations were anti-equality and non-affirming. The participants' beliefs about minority sexual orientations were in stark contrast to the status quo beliefs. As a result, they were keenly aware that supportive services in the school environment such as a GSA were controversial. They were also keenly aware that their advocacy for a GSA or for students with minority sexual orientations in general placed them in politically precarious positions. The power of the community to reproduce status quo beliefs left the participants feeling frustrated but prepared to offer resistance on some level.

Participants described their communities as politically conservative and religiously fundamentalist on the issue of sexual orientation. They experienced the pervasive conservative and fundamental ideologies held by the majority populace as welding a lot of power over allowing supportive services for students with minority orientations. The participants experienced a general sense of powerlessness against these majority views and described their own views of minority sexual orientations as politically moderate or liberal and affirming. The participants have participated in training and continued education regarding minority sexual orientations.

The participants identified advocacy as their primary role. Acting for the benefit of students permeated their professional identity. Empathy, passion, and ethics underscored their relation to students with minority sexual orientations and they were motivated to support this population from both professional and personal experiences. The participants expressed that their visibility in the school environment as an ally is crucial to reaching a population that is often, especially in conservative areas, rendered invisible. The participants believe that students with minority sexual orientations should experience the same amount of support and affirmation for who they are as do heterosexual students. To achieve this end, the participants believe that normalization of minority sexual orientations in the larger culture in necessary.

The participants identified that ideally their administrator's provide them with the resources and support to do their jobs. The subordinate position also requires that they follow administrative directives. The participants' relation to their administrators had some important implications regarding what strategies they utilized to resist status quo reproduction of non-affirming attitudes and beliefs about minority sexual orientations.

The relations of the participants to their administrators were either collaborative or adversarial. Collaborative relations yielded strategies within the school environment; adversarial relations yielded strategies away from the school environment or resignation to the status quo. Further, the administrators' relation to the community influenced whether or not their relationships were collaborative or adversarial. Nevertheless, the participants' administrators were also keenly aware of the community's power to influence school policies and procedures.

The participants experienced changes in their communities regarding increased visibility of people with minority orientations. Some minor political shifts have occurred and the level of awareness of the needs of students with minority sexual orientations has increased. They experience these shifts and changes as slow. They have learned from their experience of a GSA and their recommendations to others mirror what they experienced. The participants also continue to advocate for students with minority sexual orientations but in different ways and at different levels.

Emergent themes

Singular and collective thematic analysis of the participants' textural and structural descriptions revealed similar themes. The overarching theme among the participants is that the GSA bans were the result of a direct administrator's or an upper level administrative body yielding to the status quo conservative and non-affirming beliefs about minority sexual orientations. Three subthemes emerged, the ban prevented students from getting much needed support, proactive advocacy for the inclusion of supportive structures is the best course of action, and transformation of communities is slow.

Overarching theme: The administration yielded to the status quo

All of the participants described the larger communities in which their schools are located as politically and religiously conservative with non-progressive attitudes and beliefs about minority sexual orientations. The participants consistently described fundamentalist or conservative Christianity as the majority religious values that were represented in their local, regional, and national political leadership. As such, they perceived the GSA ban as a strategy for an administration that either wanted to avoid controversy or one that was in collusion with the status quo religious beliefs about sexual orientation held by the community.

The participants in this study perceived that support for the GSA within the school environment was present. All participants recognized that while some faculty had hesitations about including a GSA as an extracurricular club, there was no outright condemnation or internal protest designed to stop it. Overall, the participants believed the faculty understood the students were entitled to the club, were supportive of it or neutral. The perceived presence of internal support for the GSA from faculty supported the participants' perception that the GSA ban was the administration yielding to the status quo beliefs and attitudes of the larger community regarding sexual orientation.

Subtheme #1: The ban prevented students from receiving much needed support

The participants believe that students with minority sexual orientations have specific needs that affect academic achievement and they believed that the GSA would benefit these students. Among the perceived benefits, providing these students with a sense of belonging in the school environment was prevalent. For example, participants believed that having a GSA in the school would "promote a sense that other people cared

about their needs" and provide a "niche" for them in school. The students would have a place where "they could get together and talk" while at the same time "make being gay less controversial or threatening to other students."

Banning the GSA prevented all students from experiencing the benefits that the participants' believed would emerge from a GSA's presence in the school environment. As a result, they believed that all students were receiving a message that students with minority sexual orientations could not be visible thereby supporting the notion that being a non-heterosexual was something to "be punished for." The actions of the administrators were perceived as "hurtful," "painful," and "disturbing" to the overall sense of well being of the students that wanted the club.

Subtheme # 2: Proactive advocacy is the best course of action

At the close of their interviews, the participants' reflected on their experience and offered suggestions to school counselors who may find themselves in the same or similar situation. An overarching theme of proactive advocacy emerged. Participants believe that proactive advocacy for a GSA or other supportive services for students with minority sexual orientations involve becoming aware and being willing to act.

The participants believed that awareness was not simply confined to the school environment but applied to the community context as well. Among the suggestions were to be aware of the level of interest for a GSA in the school, level of support for a GSA within the school, and the motivating factors of the students that want to start a GSA. Their suggestions pertaining to the community context include know the laws specific to GSAs and other supportive services for students, know what services are available in the

community for students with minority sexual orientations, and know who in the community and school supports people with minority sexual orientations.

The participants suggest that, if armed with sufficient awareness, school counselors are better prepared to address their administrators who may be hesitant to approve a GSA. The participants believe that school counselors need to be able to show how a GSA will benefit all students and show that there are faculty, staff, and students that will support it. Additionally, they believe that school counselors who are able to articulate the legal ramifications of failing to approve the club and cite legal precedents related to school clubs may persuade a reluctant administrator to view the issue in a legal context rather than a moral one. Finally, the participants believe that school counselors that can speak to the day-to-day experiences of students with minority sexual orientation may be able to appeal to their administrators' sense of duty to promote and support ethical school counseling practice.

Subtheme # 3: Transformation of communities is slow

The participants reflected on changes in their school and larger communities since their experience of the GSA ban. From their reflections, the participants revealed themes of continued discrimination and the slow pace of change. While the participants perceived some positive changes in their communities such as increased awareness and visibility of people with minority sexual orientations, there remains few at best or none at worst, GSAs throughout their school districts. The characteristics of their communities' power structures have remained more or less the same. However, the participants have noticed some slight changes toward progressive attitudes about people with minority sexual orientations.

Textural-structural synthesis

A GSA ban at schools located in politically and religiously conservative school district comes as no surprise to school counselors. While anticipated, the experience of a GSA ban for school counselors that have politically liberal and affirming views of minority sexual orientations is still an emotional one involving feelings of being powerless, frustrated, disappointed and angry. These feelings indicate that school counselors advocating for students with minority sexual orientations experience a parallel process of oppression and discrimination in that powerful community structures minimize or silence their views about minority sexual orientations and discriminate against their professional ethics.

The professional identity of a school counselor is to be a student advocate, especially for students from marginalized populations. School counselors are motivated to advocate from a place of empathy, passion, and ethics. School counselors that are motivated to advocate for students with minority sexual orientations understand the external and internal barriers these students experience. For this reason, empathic, passionate and ethical school counselors are willing to take professional risks and advocate for them even when it is politically precarious for them to do so.

The level of risk school counselors take regarding how to respond to a GSA ban is dependent on their perspective of their administrator's position on the ban. However, whether their administrators are perceived as collaborative or adversarial, school counselors perceive that the power structures within the community ultimately decide what is allowed in schools. School counselors that have experienced a GSA ban learned that proactive advocacy is the best course of action given that issues related to sexual

orientation can create a firestorm in communities with far-reaching consequences. Proactive advocacy requires networking with other allies, researching how other schools in conservative communities have successfully implemented GSAs, and advocating from a legal rather than a moral perspective.

The experience of a GSA ban also confirms for school counselors that until the larger community becomes more accepting, supportive services in the school environment for students with these orientations will remain highly controversial. The evidence of positive but slow changes in the communities of school counselors who have experienced a GSA ban gives them hope that their students, loved ones, and acquaintances will one day be able to live full lives without hesitating to be open about who they are.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented my interpretations and findings of my interactions with five professional school counselors who identified as having had an experience with a ban on a GSA. At the beginning of the chapter, I provided a textural description of each participants followed by a composite textural description of the participants. Next, a structural description was created for each participant followed by a composite structural description. The textural-structural descriptions were analyzed for emergent themes. Based on these themes, a textural-structural synthesis was created to reveal how the participants perceived the ban and how their perceptions influenced their advocacy.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore school counselors' perceptions of a GSA ban and how their perceptions influenced their advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations. Research interviews with five school counselors who identified that they are or were working in a school that banned a GSA offered insight regarding school counselors' experiences, thoughts, and actions. The research questions in this study were: (a) How do school counselors employed in schools that have banned a GSA perceive and describe their experience of the ban? (b) How did the counselors' experience of the ban influence their advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations? (c) What suggestions did the participants have for school counselors facing similar situations? This final chapter includes a summary and discussion of the findings of this study followed by a discussion of its limitations. Next, implications for school counselors, counselor educators, supervisors and trainers, and further research are presented. Finally, I provide my personal reflections regarding how this research has impacted me professionally and personally.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

Based on the information participants shared with me during interviews, their profiles indicate that they developed affirming attitudes for individuals with minority orientations due to their close personal associations with individuals with minority

orientations and their exposure to the specific needs of this population through continued education and training. The participants strongly identified as student advocates and were aware of the barriers to academic achievement that students with minority sexual orientations experience in the school setting. The participants described their communities as politically and religiously conservative with non-progressive attitudes about non-heterosexual orientations. The participants identified their political orientations as moderate or liberal.

Regarding the research question "How do school counselors employed in schools that have banned a GSA perceive and describe their experience of the ban?" I learned that the five participants believed the following:

1. The administration banned the GSA in order to avoid controversy or collude with conservative parents or groups in the larger community that held moral or religious objections toward minority sexual orientations.
2. The ban prevented students with minority orientations from getting much needed support in the school environment, which ran counter to their ethical codes.
3. The community's power and influence over administrative decisions regarding supportive services for students with minority orientations impeded their ability to advocate for these students in the school environment.

Regarding the research question "How did their perceptions influence their advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations?" I learned the participants seemed compelled to address the ban in some way through the utilization of a variety of strategies that matched the level of their primary administrator's involvement in the ban. For example, Bob perceived his principal as being in collusion with the status quo;

therefore, he created a way to form a GSA for his students that by-passed administrative directives all together.

Jill perceived her principal as being unapproachable and unwavering on the issue. Coupled with her already diminished capacity to perform optimally as a school counselor, Jill resigned herself to the principal's decision. James perceived his principal as being primarily neutral regarding the GSA but approachable. The strategy he utilized through continued dialogue with his principal and the school council was to compromise and change the name of the GSA to something "less controversial."

Fran perceived her principal as angry and concerned that a GSA in the school would decrease enrollment from a predominantly conservative constituency. She was empowered enough to openly disagree with him and confront his decision and continues to be a vocal advocate for students with minority sexual orientations. Lisa perceived her principal to be affirming and supportive of the GSA but was powerless over an upper administrative decision to ban all non-curricular clubs to keep the GSA from forming. Lisa's strategy involved remaining a visible ally but being extremely cautious in her actions.

Overall, the participants disagreed with the administrative directives while at the same time recognizing that their subordinate status meant that they must defer to these directives. All participants were keenly aware of the power embedded within the conservative social context of their schools. Their efforts to provide ethical services hinged on their ability to circumvent controversy within the school and community setting. All participants conclude that the best course of action is to find allies both within the school environment and out in the community prior to engaging in, as Bob described,

"a big battle." Using Bob's analogy, the participants' experienced different "battle lines." In Bob and Lisa's experience with a GSA ban, the lines were drawn within the school context as evidenced by Bob's administrator's religious beliefs and Jill's administrator's indifference to the presence of, let alone their needs, of students with minority sexual orientations. In James, Lisa, and Fran's experience, the lines were drawn in the community as evidenced by the ability of the community to influence decisions about what is or is not allowed to happen at school in support of students with minority orientations. In terms of outcome, James, Lisa, and Fran were able to advocate for the students in some way, albeit not ideally, while Bob and Lisa were not able to advocate within the school environment at all. Thus, networking with other allies within the school environment to establish a dialogue about the needs of these students is essential, particularly in conservative communities.

The participants' experience illustrates that the broader social context of a school's environment has a significant impact on whether or not students are allowed to form a GSA. Likewise Fetner and Kush (2008) explored social predictors of the GSAs that were formed prior to 2003 and determined that students in rural areas, small towns, and conservative regions were less likely to have the support needed from the community to form a GSA. This trend is evidenced in the participants' of this study's assertion that while sufficient support to form the GSA was found within the school environment among faculty, staff, and students, support in the larger religiously and politically conservative community was lacking.

The participants were frustrated over having to yield to conservative parents or groups that held religious objections to minority sexual orientations. They perceived

these parents or groups to be unmoved by the needs of students and primarily concerned with preserving their particular religious views about sexual orientation. Their perceptions of the opposition are consistent with Miceli's (2005) results of a content analysis of several hundred letters to the editor in newspapers across the country in conservative areas where the attempted formation of a GSA created considerable controversy. She found that the primary argument against GSAs put forth by conservative groups is based in their belief that GSAs are a part of a "gay agenda" that seeks to corrupt the morals and values of minors by encouraging them to engage in what they perceive as deviant sexual behavior. As a result, she asserts that "all those involved with the GSA movement are forced, time and time again, to contend with the morality frame of the opposition and the power it has over public opinion."

While national opinion polls consistently show that public opinion regarding minority sexual orientations generally continues to move in a positive direction, a gap between the opinions about minority sexual orientations held by individuals that identify as religiously and politically conservative persists and continues to widen (Linneman, 2004; Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006; Herck, 2006). Information supporting that sexual orientation is fixed at birth, knowing someone who has a minority sexual orientation and increased exposure to individuals with minority sexual orientations in the popular media account for the continued trend of acceptance in the larger culture (Wilcox & Norrander, 2002; Wilcox & Wolpert, 2000). Predictors that these factors are less likely to influence attitudes and beliefs about minority sexual orientation are conservative political ideology, religious affiliation with a Protestant denomination and identifying as a born again Christian. Individuals fitting this demographic profile attribute sexual orientation to

choice and believe that a non- heterosexual choice is deviant (Haider-Marckel & Joslyn, 2008; Hicks & Lee, 2006).

For individuals who view homosexuality as a sin, Brewer (2003) suggests that the improvements in the larger culture for individuals with minority sexual orientations compels them to mobilize and protest vigorously against what they perceive as a hostile threat to their belief system and their right to perpetuate it. Thus, school counselors in conservative areas that attempt to provide supportive services for students with minority sexual orientations, as did the participants in this study, often find themselves embroiled in what many religiously and politically conservative parents and groups believe is a culture war that they must win at all costs (Linneman, 2004). Sometimes the cost is the loss of progressive administrators, faculty and staff; the largest cost is the emotional, physical, and academic well-being of students.

The findings of my analysis also further elucidate the interconnectedness of a school counselor's role with her/his administration and how this can be problematic. In general, participants reported they depend on their administrators for the supervision and tools they need to fulfill their obligations. However, support was denied or withdrawn with respect to a GSA. The participants continued to advocate, providing evidence that school counselors who identify strongly as advocates and hold affirming beliefs and attitudes about minority sexual orientations are willing to take professional risks to fulfill their ethical obligations to this population.

Likewise, in a qualitative study of 13 teachers and one school social worker who decided to be the advisor to GSAs in their schools in spite of controversy from conservative parents or groups, (Valenti & Campbell, 2009), participants were motivated

to be the club's advisor out of protective attitudes toward students and personal connections with loved ones with minority sexual orientations. The participants believed there were several risks associated with advising a GSA, with fear of job loss among the most prominent of their worries.

Other studies support this notion of advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations without administrative support. For example, DeMauro (2009) found that 100% of 93 middle school counselors surveyed about their intervention strategies in support of students with minority orientations have encountered situations wherein they observed other students bullying or harassing these students. All of them indicated they addressed this behavior directly with the perpetrators and/or their targets. However, 34% did not believe their administration would want them to discuss this topic with the general student body, 26% did not believe their administration would want them to discuss it with parents, and 33% would not want them to discuss it in staff development workshops. Choosing to remain silent on such issues, while reducing the threat of controversy with groups within the community, increases the risk for students with minority sexual orientations. Administrators that insist on silence and other behaviors to appease the status quo may be creating hostile work environments for school counselors that are attempting ethical practice and may also be contributing to a hostile learning environment for an at risk student population.

The findings of this research supported the theoretical framework within which it was created. Reproduction theory (Giroux, 1985): the social context of the participants' schools were religiously and politically conservative and groups within this social context with objections to supportive services for students with minority sexual orientations were

able to influence administrative level decisions that reproduced and reinforced their beliefs. The opposition groups utilized systematic inclusion (Friend, 1993) by framing their opposition to the GSA as something that would be harmful to students. Resistance theory (Giroux, 1985): the school counselors in this study attempted to resist the status quo beliefs through a variety of strategies. This resistance was rooted in altruism, their autonomy as a student advocate, and their willingness to take risks to meet the needs of students. All of these attributes are characteristic of an advocacy disposition, the most crucial component of advocacy competency (Trusty & Brown, 2005).

Limitations

Participants

While a limited number of participants is generic to qualitative research (Creswell, 1998), transferability of the results of this study should be tempered with caution as only five participants came forward to participate. Further, the participants were homogeneous with regard to a heterosexual orientation, affirming attitudes and beliefs about minority sexual orientations, professional identification as advocates, non-conservative political affiliations, and the politically and religiously conservative climate of their school community. The lack of diversity among these variables must be considered a limitation as the experience of a school counselor with a minority sexual orientation and/or a conservative political affiliation, and/or religious beliefs that do not affirm minority sexual orientations may significantly vary from these five participants. Nevertheless, despite such limitations, the data analysis revealed consistency within and between the participants' experience that supports the themes that emerged at the conclusion of the analysis.

Controversial nature of the research topic

Considering the amount of concern related to fear of reprisal for participating that the pilot study participants experienced and the reassurances some of the current participants needed that their identities would be kept confidential, it is reasonable to suggest that similar concerns prevented some school counselors from agreeing to participate in the study. Further, the identities of the schools the participants work or worked in cannot be revealed, as per the informed consent, to protect the identity of the school counselors that agreed to participate. As such, oppressive structures within the communities that banned GSAs in and of themselves are a limitation to this study.

Researcher subjectivity

My subjectivity should also be considered a limitation. I shared many of the same emotions, attitudes, and beliefs as my participants. My sexual orientation is heterosexual, I have affirming attitudes and beliefs toward individuals with minority sexual orientations, politically I identify as liberal, I identify as an advocate for marginalized populations, and I live and work in a religiously and politically conservative community. My similarities with the participants may have contributed positively to the research process while at the same time may have decreased my ability to be completely objective in the process.

Implications

The empirical examination of the school experience of students with minority sexual orientations has provided ample evidence that they are an at risk population that remains vulnerable due to contextual factors such as majority group religious and political objections to minority sexual orientations in the larger community. Professional

codes of ethics mandate that community and school counselors address these factors in a myriad of ways including consulting, training, and advocating for fair, safe, and equal treatment of persons with minority sexual orientations.

Prior to this study, there have been few attempts to explore how school counselors with professional membership in an organization with clear guidelines that expect advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations perceive and address a discriminatory act against these students, such as a GSA ban. This study is an attempt to fill this gap in the literature by offering the point of view of school counselors regarding what it is like to navigate their professional identities as ethical advocates for students with minority sexual orientations in an environment that offers little to no administrative support for doing so.

The findings of this study apply to practicing school counselors, the education of future school counselors, and the supervision and training of practicing school counselors, and future research regarding school counselors as advocates for students with minority sexual orientations. The following section provides a description of the implications of the findings for each of the aforementioned areas.

Implications for practicing school counselors

School counselors should anticipate that they will encounter students with minority sexual orientations. School counselors, especially those working in religiously and politically conservative areas, should also anticipate that students with minority sexual orientations may not be forthcoming about their struggles unless they are given some indication that the school counselor is affirming and will provide a safe environment for them to process their struggles. School counselors should also be aware

that students with minority sexual orientations need to know that their efforts to be included in school activities will be supported.

School counselors should also maintain a proactive stance and work steadily within the school system and larger community to inform, educate, and/or promote a dialogue about the needs of students with minority sexual orientations. They should also seek to inform the school and community about how the need for affirmation, safety, and inclusion is directly related to the physical, emotional, and academic well-being of these students. They should also anticipate that changing discriminatory practices against students with minority sexual orientations will most likely be a slow and oftentimes frustrating process, particularly in conservative areas.

The first step a school counselor must take toward ethical practice for students with minority sexual orientations is to examine her or his beliefs and attitudes about sexuality in general and sexual orientation in particular. These beliefs and attitudes must be sufficiently deconstructed so that biases are exposed, examined, and then reconstructed in a manner that includes minority sexual orientations as a normal, viable way of being and expressing love and affection. School counselors with religious beliefs that do not support such a reconstruction should evaluate their practice regarding students with minority sexual orientations in the same manner as if they were counseling an individual or group that had other religious or cultural differences from themselves.

The next critical step is to become a visible ally within the school environment. This can be accomplished by placing a pink triangle or a rainbow sticker on an office door or wall and/or placing affirming literature regarding minority orientations on a bookshelf or end table. Attendance at a workshop such as Safe Zone training may also

provide practical suggestions about how to be a visible ally at school. It is also extremely crucial that school counselors not wait for students to initiate a dialogue about their needs in the school environment. Instead, school counselors should conduct outreach maneuvers that include, but are not limited to, including sexual orientation in classroom guidance programs about diversity and organizing student participation in events such as National Coming Out Day and A Day of Silence both of which are featured on PFLAG's national website and through GLSEN.org.

School counselors can also ensure that historical and contemporary figures with multiple minority sexual orientations are represented in the curriculum. For example, James Baldwin, Willa Cather, Oscar Wilde, and Tennessee Williams are historical literary figures from different genres and periods whose sexual orientation could be included in their biographies and other learning materials. In addition, school counselors can ensure that historical and contemporary figures with minority sexual orientations are represented in monthly observances such as African American History month, Women's History month, science fairs, diversity celebrations, and holiday celebrations. Regarding GSAs, school counselors should become familiar with the Equal Access Law. GSAs are protected under this law and organizations such as the ACLU and LAMBDA have successfully argued in court and prevailed in instances where school officials have banned or prohibited GSAs from forming.

School counselors should also be mindful that there are likely others working within the school environment who are affirming but perhaps unsure how to become visible. They may be willing to help form a network of allies in the community. Forming a coalition with these individuals and advocating as a group for systemic change in the

school environment that is more inclusive of minority sexual orientations is a more powerful approach than is trying to advocate in a vacuum, especially if working in a religiously or politically conservative area. School counselors working in these areas should also bear in mind that proactive advocacy for students with minority sexual orientations may cause considerable anxiety due to the professional and personal risk that may be incurred. Advocacy that aims to transform a system takes courage.

School counselors should be aware of local, regional, and national resources available to them that will enhance their efforts to advocate for this population. In conservative and/or rural areas, the amount of local community support may be lacking therefore networking with nearby urban centers is essential to obtaining supportive services for students with minority sexual organizations. Many national organizations such as Parents, Friends, and Families of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), the Gay-Lesbian-Straight Education Network (GLSEN), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and the Southern Poverty Law Center have resources to assist school counselors in their endeavors to act ethically on behalf of students with minority sexual orientations. Most materials available are free or can be purchased for a minimal cost.

School counselors with religious beliefs that do not support minority sexual orientations or political agendas that do not support equal rights for such persons should be aware that students with minority sexual orientations must be afforded the same rights and privileges as heterosexual students. Given that our constitution upholds the separation of church and state, school counselors with these beliefs must understand that these beliefs cannot be the basis on which interventions in support of students with minority sexual orientations are decided.

School counselors with such beliefs must find someone in the school environment, preferably their supervisor or a peer, with whom she/he can dialogue about whether or not she/he is able to set aside such beliefs to act in the best interest of the student. Further, school counselors with these beliefs still need to engage in proactive advocacy for these students, which will require exposing themselves to information, and resources that run counter to their religious or political positions. Zero tolerance for harassment and bullying policies and/or understanding there are legal ramifications of not protecting or supporting at risk students may be the best place for these school counselors to refer when deciding how to approach issues in the school environment that impact the overall well-being of this population.

Implications for counselor educators, supervisors, and trainers

Counselor educators, supervisors, and trainers are charged with providing research based and innovative information and experiential learning designed to increase professional competency. Professional competency includes multicultural, ethical, and practical dimensions. Sexual orientation is one of the many demographic variables examined in the multicultural literature and advocacy for persons with minority sexual orientations are delineated in professional counseling organizations' codes of ethics. Counseling persons with minority sexual orientations, whether in a school or community setting requires multicultural competency and advocacy competency.

The findings of this study could be utilized to begin a dialogue in an ethics or a multicultural counseling course about the parallel systemic barriers students with minority sexual orientations share with the school counselors who attempt to advocate for them in oppressive community environments. In addition, the findings can also be used to

illustrate the need for practitioners, especially those working in religiously or politically conservative areas to anticipate the arguments against supportive services for students with minority sexual orientations and provide them with resources that are grounded in legal, ethical, and universal principals to successfully counter this opposition.

The findings could also be utilized as an example for school counselors or trainees with religious or political biases against minority sexual orientations to explore how their beliefs may interfere with their ability to ethically provide services for this student population. In doing so, counselor educators, supervisors, and trainers must provide sufficient support for their students, supervisees, or trainees while at the same time challenge them to think about how they will ensure that a referral to someone who can provide ethical services will happen.

Counselor educators, supervisors, and trainers should not assume that their students, supervisees, and trainees are progressive in their thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs about minority sexual orientations. They should act as if there are those among them who are struggling with how to reconcile their religious or political beliefs about sexual orientation with best practice standards and ethical mandates. As gatekeepers of the counseling profession, counselor educators and supervisors, and to lesser degree trainers, must remind their students, employees, and trainees that nothing less than ethical practice for this population will be accepted. They must also regularly provide supervision and/or training opportunities to encourage school counselors and trainees to regularly examine their efforts to advocate for students with minority sexual orientations.

Finally, counselor educators should reach out to their colleagues in education departments and offer, for example, a lecture series for future school administrators on

the issues of faced by students with minority sexual orientations. This lecture series could also include information about what school counselors are ethically required to do for these students. Finally, the lecture series could provide recommendations for administrators about how they can work with school counselors to address public opposition against the inclusion of supportive services for students with minority sexual orientations. Inviting education majors and doctoral students in education departments to lectures in multicultural and diversity classes that are specific to persons with minority sexual orientations is also worth considering. As shown in this research, school counselors are dependent on their administrators for the supervision and support needed to perform optimally in their role as student advocates. However, when it comes to advocating for students with minority sexual orientations, this is oftentimes lacking. Cross- training for future administrators and school counselors could help eliminate this disparity.

Implications for future research

The findings of this research indicated that heterosexual school counselors who identify as student advocates and have affirming attitudes and beliefs about minority sexual orientations are willing to take risks to advocate for this population. Two other studies (Ji, 2007; Dillon, et al., 2004) provide information regarding similar themes about the relationship between affirming attitudes about minority sexual orientations and advocacy for people with minority sexual orientations. Further qualitative examinations into the development of these affirming attitudes may provide insight into the internal structures that sustain an advocacy disposition (Trusty & Brown, 2005). Understanding how an advocacy disposition is developed and nurtured for an at risk population such as

students with minority sexual orientations could pave the way for the understanding of the development of an advocacy disposition in general.

The absence of religiously or politically conservative participants in my study and other studies regarding advocacy for students with minority orientations poses the question "how do they reconcile their non-affirming attitudes and beliefs with ethical practice for non-heterosexual students?" Understanding this process may be crucial to determining how counselor educators, supervisors, and trainers may best promote a dialogue with them about ethical practice for this population while at the same time respecting and preserving their right to have these beliefs. Understanding this process could also offer insight into factors that facilitate and/or impede the creation of a dialogue with religiously and politically conservative community leaders about the need for spaces in the school environment and larger community for persons with minority sexual orientations.

The findings of this research revealed the participants' believed their administrators yielded to status quo community beliefs about sexual orientation. Thus, a qualitative exploration into how school administrators make decisions about supportive services for students with minority sexual orientations is warranted. Since administrators wield a lot of power in the school environment, knowing what motivates them to yield to or resist status quo community beliefs could aid in preparing school counselors to successfully partner with their administrators to negotiate with community leaders on issues related to sexual orientation. Further, an examination of how demographic variables such as school type (elementary, middle, or high school) and location (urban, suburban, or rural) influence administrative actions regarding supportive services for

students with minority orientations is also warranted. Finally, to help us understand how widespread or contained the denial of supportive services for students with minority sexual orientations is, quantitative data from a nationally representative sample of school counselors from every school district in the United States is necessary.

Personal Reflections

When I began my dissertation process, another student had recently murdered 14-year-old Larry King, an openly gay student. Both are causalities of homophobia and homo-negativity in a California school. As I was collecting and analyzing the data for my dissertation, two 11-year old boys, Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover, of Massachusetts and Jaheem Herrera, of Georgia committed suicide by hanging due to what the news media described as homophobic bullying. As I was writing up the results of my dissertation study, I learned that a gay student at a local high school in my community committed suicide. At the same time, activists and students at Yulee High School in Florida filed a lawsuit in order to form a GSA and to be able to use the word "gay" in its name (ACLU, 2009).

If we are in the midst of what religiously and politically conservative people call a "culture war" over equal rights for persons with minority sexual orientations, then relying on students alone to initiate supportive services in the school environment is akin to having them hunker down in the trenches and fight the battle for us. All too often, they become casualties. And what of the walking wounded? Countless numbers of emotionally wounded children and young people want relief but have limited external resources to which to turn. Are we willing to sacrifice any more young lives so that one

group's religious beliefs about sexual orientation are privileged? The answer for me is a resounding "no."

Completing this research was a professionally and personally enriching experience. As I pondered the experiences of my participants, I came to realize how much the six of us had in common. In many ways, we are "culture ambassadors" doing covert operations so to speak in the thick of the "other side." We are heterosexual allies living and working in religiously and politically conservative areas and like my participant Fran, I too have wondered if I am in the right place? Is it all worthwhile? Like her, I say with enthusiasm, "yes I am." Throughout the research process, as I became more and more connected to my participant's stories, I felt less isolated and less frustrated with the continued discrimination evident in my own community and with the slow pace of positive change. It is my hope that likeminded school and community counselors in religiously and politically conservative areas that may read this will feel the same way.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Time and date of interview _____ Participant number_____

1. First, tell me a little about yourself, such as how you decided to become a counselor.

2. Describe your role as a school counselor, including the most rewarding aspect of your profession and how you believe students benefit from your services.

3. As a school counselor, what student populations do you believe are over-served? Under-served?

4. How does your principal support you and the services you provide?

5. How does your role as a student advocate fit with your professional identity?

6. What else regarding your professional identity as a school counselor would you like to tell me?

7. What lead you to participate in this study?

8. What is your understanding of the ASCA standards regarding school counselor's ethical obligations toward students with minority sexual orientations?

9. How do you advocate for students with minority sexual orientations?

10. Describe for me in as much detail as possible, the events at your school leading up to the GSA ban.

11. What were your personal reactions to these events, including any thoughts or feelings that stood out for you?

12. What did you notice about the reaction of faculty or other staff about these events?

13. What role did you play, if any, during these events?

14. Describe for me what happened when the GSA was banned, including your role and your personal reactions to the ban, particularly your thoughts and feelings about the ban.

15. What do you remember about the reactions of other school staff and community members about the ban?

16. What were your feelings or thoughts concerning the ban that were most prominent?

17. Was there anything that you would like to have said or done but didn't during the GSA ban?

18. What, if anything, have you been involved in regarding the GSA ban? What stimulates or impedes your involvement?

19. How did the GSA ban affect you personally?

20. Did the GSA ban change your perception of the needs of students with minority sexual orientations and if so, describe those changes?

21. What was the impact of the GSA ban on the school community (student body, staff, administration)? Please provide examples.

22. What has been the impact of the GSA ban on the larger community (parents, government officials, community stakeholders)? Please provide examples.

23. Based on your experience with this issue, what recommendations would you give to other school counselors dealing with a similar issue?

24. Is there anything you would like to add that you believe might be important to help us understand your experience?

APPENDIX B: INTRODUCTORY LETTER

(insert letterhead)

Dear School Counseling Professional,

You have been selected to receive this invitation to participate in an interview process as a part of the dissertation requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in counseling at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of practicing school counselors who are or were working in a school setting that banned a Gay-Straight Alliance Club. Your name and address were obtained from the ASCA on-line membership directory therefore if you do not meet the criterion for participation but are aware of a colleague who does, please forward this email to him/her.

The interview will only take approximately 60 to 90 minutes to complete and will be conducted at a place and time that is convenient for the participants. Participation in carrying out this research will add valuable contribution to the field of school counseling. The identity and information of those willing to participate will be kept both anonymous and confidential, as no participant names or school names or email addresses will be identified with your interview responses.

Participants may withdraw or decline participation without penalty at any time. Please contact the researcher, Amy M. Sifford, by e-mail at amsiffor@uncc.edu, or by telephone at 704-675-5192, if you would like to participate in this study.

Your participation and time is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Amy M. Sifford, MA
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counseling
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT POSTER

WANTED !!!

SCHOOL COUNSELORS
WHO WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE
(SEE BACK FOR MORE INFO)

WANTED !!!

SCHOOL COUNSELORS NEEDED WHO ARE WORKING OR HAVE WORKED IN A SCHOOL WHERE A GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE HAS BEEN BANNED

PLEASE CONTACT AMY SIFFORD (*amsiffor@uncc.edu*) IF YOU ARE WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT FOCUSED ON SCHOOL COUNSELORS & ADVOCACY FOR SEXUAL MINORITY STUDENTS.
704-675-5192

APPENDIX D: SOCIAL NETWORK POST

"I am searching for school counselors who are working or were working in a school setting that banned a gay-straight alliance club for participation in my dissertation research. If interested, please email Amy Sifford at amsiffor@uncc.edu if you would like more information."

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(insert letterhead)

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study that will explore the experience of school counseling professionals who are or were working in a school that banned a Gay-Straight Alliance. Your participation will involve agreeing to participate in a face-to-face interview that will be audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. You will also be given a brief demographic questionnaire that will provide the researcher with information related to your educational level and course work, number of years in the counseling field, gender and age. The interview will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes to complete and will occur at a time and place that is convenient for you.

The data collected by the researcher during the interview will not contain any identifying information about you or your school setting; therefore any information collected will be kept both anonymous and confidential. To ensure anonymity, your data will be assigned a case number and transcribed interview data will be entered into a computer program using this number. No one other than the researcher and dissertation committee will have access to the audiotapes or transcriptions that will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and/or a password protected computer program. Upon completion of the data analysis, the audio tapes and transcriptions will be destroyed. The results will be shared with you upon final analysis of the data.

The benefits of your participation in this human subject study include contributing to the current knowledge, characteristics, and views regarding current issues in the school counseling profession as well as implications for counselor educators and trainees. Although discussing controversial issues can be difficult, there are no known risks in participating in this study. You may withdraw or decline without penalty at any time. However, data collected up to the time of withdrawal from participation will be analyzed and included in the study.

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may change your mind and stop at any time. UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the University's Research Compliance Office 704-687-3309 if you have any questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the project, please contact me, Amy Sifford, at 704-675-5192 or my Dissertation Chair Dr. Pam Lassiter, PhD, 704-687-8960.

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this document, I am giving consent to participate in this study. I also agree that I am a licensed/certified practicing school counselor who is working or was working in a school where a Gay-Straight Alliance Club was banned. I understand that I will be provided a copy of this form after it has been signed by the researcher and me.

Signatures

_____ _____

Printed Participant Name Date

_____

Participant Signature

_____ _____

Researcher Signature Date

APPENDIX F: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Participant Number _____

Gender _____ Race _____ Age_____ Level of Education _____

Years of experience as school counselor _____

School setting: Rural Urban Suburban

Geographic location:

Southeast Southwest Northeast Northwest Midwest

Graduate of CACREP accredited program? Y N

Member of ASCA? Y N

Number of hours of multicultural course work and/or diversity training _____

Number of hours of coursework and/or training on counseling individuals with minority sexual orientations? _____

How do you describe your political affiliation?

Conservative Moderate Liberal Other

How do you describe your sexual orientation?

_____

Use the space below to make any additional comments about yourself that you believe is important for the researcher to know:

APPENDIX G: RESEARCHER'S EXPERIENCE OF THE PHENOMENON

Twenty- two years ago, as a beginning counselor working in a group home for delinquent and undisciplined adolescents who were in the legal custody of the department of social services, I attempted to enroll one of my clients in school. I was particularly happy because, as I told him, I had graduated from that high school a decade earlier. I told him that I had fond memories and that while it was a small, rural school, it had been far from a boring experience.

Once there, we were greeted by the receptionist and escorted to the guidance office. The school counselor invited us to sit and stated she would be with us shortly as she exited the room. Several minutes passed when two men entered the room, identifying themselves as the principal and vice principal. The principal seated himself in the school counselor's chair and the vice principal stood in front of the office door. In response to his inquiry as to why we were there, I repeated our intent was to enroll my client in school. I was ill prepared for what happened next.

The principal stated he would not allow my client to enroll in *his* school for fear that my client's appearance would create a disturbance. My client, who was gay, enjoyed wearing colorful clothing, eye makeup and painting his fingernails. In my naiveté regarding the existence of overt homophobia and accompanying discrimination in the school setting, it never occurred to me that his appearance would be of consequence as he had right to a free and public education regardless of it. Naturally upset, my client rose to his feet and made for the door. The vice principal put his hand on the doorknob, refusing his exit until I demanded sternly that we be allowed to leave.

I remember that as I made that demand, I spoke through my teeth, all the while seething inside, heart pounding, eager to leave the room else I cry in front of them. I remember feeling trapped, over powered, and insignificant. The principal escorted us out of the building and when we were safe in my car, both of us wept. A wellspring of sorrow erupted from within him and one of anger within me. I attempted to comfort my client, thinking all the while that this was my fault, that I had projected my feelings about the school on to him, and in the end making him feel more alone and unaccepted. I remember thinking, and becoming more angry as I did, that the principal and vice principle did not give any credit to their student body. How did he know that my client's appearance would create a disturbance in his school? Further, whose problem was it, my client's or the students' if a disturbance ensued?

I would like to say that those with the most power and influence in this young man's life rose to the occasion armed with a zealous demand for just retribution. I would like to say that my disappointment in their response propelled me to protest that something more substantial needed to occur. However, a handful of telephone calls by my supervisor and my client's legal guardian to the school superintendent yielded a mere teleconference with the principal who apologized and offered my client admittance to his school.

I silently seethed that the principal should be reprimanded and exposed for his treatment of a child, a child more vulnerable than most given his status as a foster child and a person with a minority sexual orientation. I believed that something more substantial needed to be done but I did not believe that I was the person best suited to do so. My client did not accept the apology and he was enrolled in another school. A long-

term placement for him was located, and the issue abandoned. I felt intense sorrow and shame because I believed we had let him down. Sixth months later, I received word that he had committed suicide.

I think about this incident a lot. I think about how naïve I was and how powerless I felt. What compelled them, two education professionals entrusted with the education of their community's children, to believe that it was all right for them to humiliate and discriminate against my client based on his appearance or his sexual orientation? What, in my coursework as a student of psychology and in my training as a counselor, had prepared me for such an occurrence? What was I to do with the anger I felt toward the principal, vice principal, the school superintendent, the social worker, the group home director, and his parents? What was I to do with the shame I felt toward myself for not insisting something more be done to address the emotional abuse against my client perpetrated by the principal and vice principal?

I spent many days wondering how things may have been different if I had been his parent, that if he was mine, how might have I reacted. From this experience I came to hold fast to the conclusion that he *was* mine, as are all people I encounter in my professional capacity, young and old, who need an advocate the most. I began to understand that while I had exorcised the homophobic demons instilled in me by a fundamentalist religious upbringing, I had yet to confront the fact that I was oblivious to how oppression and discrimination against people with minority sexual orientations in the larger culture cut to the very core of their being.

I came to understand that accepting and affirming the non-heterosexual orientations of some of my friends and associates would take more than simply "it is

okay if you are gay" but would require reflective self-examination and an acceptance that I viewed the world through heterosexist lens. I began to understand power and oppression, that what those in power dictated was often not just or fair. There was my client, a teenager and then the rest of us, adults with degrees and positions in human services and education, degrees and positions to use for what purpose? The "what" for me was to find my voice to speak out, and my courage to act, against inequality and injustice. Thus began my development of an advocacy disposition for sexual minorities and other marginalized groups. With this research, I continue on this path.