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# Exploring the experiences of school counselor-administrator teams in their work with LGBT students: a phenomenological study

Matthew Jon Beck  
*University of Iowa*

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EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL COUNSELOR-ADMINISTRATOR  
TEAMS IN THEIR WORK WITH LGBT STUDENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Matthew Jon Beck

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Rehabilitation and Counselor  
Education in the  
Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2017

Thesis Supervisors: Associate Professor Susannah M. Wood  
Assistant Professor Gerta Bardhoshi

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for  
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## ABSTRACT

Research suggests the collaborative role school counselors can have with administrators to bolster school reform and facilitate a safe and positive learning environment for all K-12 students (College Board, 2009a, 2009b) is vital. Unfortunately, research that explores the roles and efforts of school counselors and administrators in their collaborative work for and with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students is scarce. Yet, according to Goodrich, Harper, Luke, and Singh (2013), LGBT students “have long struggled in schools with little support” (p. 319). To address this gap, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of school counselors and administrators in their work to support a safe and supportive school climate for LGBT students. The following research questions informed and guided this study: a) What are the lived experiences of school counselors and administrators who make concerted efforts to improve the educational environment for LGBT students? b) How do school counselors and administrators make meaning with their relationships in their work with LGBT students?

The methods used to recruit participants for this study were modeled after College Board’s (2009b) study with seven exemplary school counselor-principal teams. In College Board’s (2009b) study, researchers identified school counselors and principals who received recognition for demonstrating exemplary contribution in their respective professional organizations. These exemplary professionals were then paired with their school counselor/administrator counterpart for joint interviews (College Board, 2009b).

By paralleling the best practice protocol established by the College Board (2009b), this study consisted of three rounds of interviews with four school counselor-administrator teams. Participants were selected from national and/or state level LGBT educational organizations,

where a school counselor and/or administrator were awarded/recognized for creating a safe and inclusive school environment for LGBT youth. Additional participants included school counselors and administrators identified as the school counselor or administrator counterpart to the awarded. The researcher completed an inductive approach to data analysis, utilizing both open coding and horizontalization to reduce the data. Thematic categories emerged from the data and are presented and discussed as they relate to the overarching research questions. The between-case themes include: Learning firsthand, leading by example, intentional partnering, moving beyond turf wars, and pushing the system. Recommendations for school counselors, administrators, and school counselor-administrator teams are provided. Directions for future research are also discussed.

*Keywords:* School counselors, administrators, interdisciplinary collaboration, LGBT youth

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

LGBT youth represent a student population that is at-risk for bullying in the form of violence, harassment, and other negative mental health challenges. The literature calls upon both school counselors and administrators to develop equitable school climates that are safe and supportive for all students, including LGBT youth. However, studies have not explored the relationship experiences between school counselors and administrators in schools that support the unique needs of LGBT students. In particular, investigating the experiences of school counselor-administrator teams in their work for and with LGBT students may offer insights and best practices for school counselors, administrators, and training programs regarding how to improve the educational experiences for LGBT youth.

This phenomenological study captured the unique perspectives of four school counselor-administrator teams regarding current practices and training on LGBT student issues. Each team participated in three rounds of semi-structured interviews conducted in a span of 2-3 months. The themes of this study revealed several stories and personal examples regarding how each team developed a meaningful and intentional alliance for their efforts on behalf of LGBT students. In particular, the results indicated that learning firsthand from personal experience and true stories of LGBT individuals, whether within the relationship or from an outside network, was an important experience for team members. In addition, teams in this study were also able to align their vision, expertise, and roles towards effective LGBT youth advocacy and integrate purpose in their collaborative actions for change. The five overarching themes included: Learning firsthand, leading by example, intentional partnering, moving beyond turf wars, and pushing the system.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background**

For lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students, who encompass approximately 5 % to 10% of the K-12 student population (DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009), K-12 school environments can be unsafe and hostile. In 2013, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducted a study with over 7,800 LGBT middle and high school students (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). Findings indicate that 65% of LGBT students report hearing biased messages such as the word “gay” used in derogatory manners and 30% of LGBT students reported missing at least one day of school for not feeling safe (Kosciw et al., 2014). Research on LGBT students also concludes that 17.5% of LGBT youth are prohibited from writing or talking about LGBT themes in school coursework (Kosciw et al., 2014) as well as lack intervention from school personnel when discrimination and harassment towards LGBT youth occurs (Snapp, Burdge, Licona, Moody, & Russell, 2015a). Similarly, the Human Rights Campaign’s (HRC) (2012) study, *Growing up LGBT in America*, found that 51% of LGBT youth were verbally harassed, compared to 25% among non-LGBT youth. Findings also indicate that 29% of LGBT youth report needing an adult to talk to about their personal concerns at school, while only 17% of non-LGBT students cite assistance (HRC, 2012).

Recent legislation that marginalizes and discriminates against LGBT students in K-12 public schools also informs educators, researchers, and policy makers regarding the need for intervention. Data as of February 19, 2016 from the Human Rights Campaign (2016), reported that 23 anti-transgender bills were filed and specifically targeted at students in public schools. Additionally, in March 2016, North Carolina became the first state to mandate that transgender

and gender nonconforming youth utilize restrooms and locker rooms that adhere to their assigned sex at birth (HRC, 2016). These dangerous practices can make schools hostile and negative for students who identify as LGBT. A rich body of literature identifies the effects of a non-affirming school environment on the academic, personal/social, and college and career development of LGBT students (DePaul et al., 2009, Goodrich et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2014).

Hostile climates can directly impact LGBT youths' academic achievements, mental outcomes, and overall connectedness to school. For example, a quantitative study of 5,730 LGBT students conducted by Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, and Greytak (2012) found that anti-LGBT bullying and victimization correlated to lower academic outcomes and self-esteem of LGBT students. GLSEN's (2013) study found that LGBT students were twice as likely to not have any post-secondary education plans than compared to peers who experienced decreased victimization levels (8.7% vs. 4.2%) (Kosciw et al., 2014). Studies also demonstrate that LGBT students are at particular risk for emotional distress and suicide (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009). For example, in the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC), National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS; Kann et al., 2016) LGB youth were more than 4 times (29.4%) likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual students (6.4%). Almeida and colleagues (2009) found that LGBT youth have elevated levels of emotional distress and are more likely than their heterosexual peers to disclose suicidal ideation (30% vs. 6%). This research indicates that hostile school climates can negatively impact the academic, personal/social, and college/career success for LGBT youth. However, a growing body of research demonstrates that LGBT-related supports and services can have positive outcomes for LGBT youths' success.

## **Safe School Initiatives**

Because of the complex picture of LGBT student experiences, scholars call upon educators to promote a safe and anti-bullying learning environment for all students (Kosciw et al., 2012; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010). Research highlights best practices that educators can implement to create a nondiscriminatory school climate for LGBT youth (Kosciw et al., 2012; Snapp et al., 2015a; Toomey et al., 2010). These best practices include: Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), inclusive curricular resources, supportive school personnel, and comprehensive policies that enumerate sexual orientation as well as gender identity/expression (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Group counseling and the development of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) can be effective strategies to assess the effects of a hostile school environment as well as create a safe space for LGBT youth to gather, talk, and advocate for inclusive programming (Bidell, 2011; Kosciw et al., 2012, 2014). Specifically, when LGBT students are exposed to extracurricular groups such as GSAs, they report less anti-LGBT victimization (Kosciw et al., 2012) and increased connectedness at school (64.4%) than compared to schools without a GSA (46.0%) (Kosciw et al., 2014). Similarly, Walls, Kane, and Wisneski (2010) found that LGBT youth in schools with GSAs report decreased absenteeism and increased school connectedness and safety.

Research also documents the critical role of school personnel in bolstering a more inclusive and positive learning experience for LGBT students (Kosciw et al., 2012, 2014). For example, GLSEN's (2013) study found that when LGBT youth can identify many (11 or more) affirming and supportive staff members at school, they report increased grade point averages (3.3 vs. 2.8) and are less likely to not engage in postsecondary options (3.0% vs, 12.0%) (Kosciw et al., 2014). Conversely, LGBT youth have also spoken to the lack of support and intervention

from school personnel when bullying occurs (Snapp et al., 2015a). Specifically, when asked how LGBT youth perceive support from their principal, 12.6% of youth report that their principal was very supportive (Kosciw et al., 2014). From a mental health perspective, 53.1% of LGBT students reported feeling “somewhat or very comfortable” talking with their school based-mental health provider (Kosciw et al., 2014, p. 59). Thus, LGBT youth not feeling comfortable and/or not even knowing which educator to talk to may further perpetuate a culture of discrimination.

Conceptual articles call upon educators to adopt a systemic approach (i.e., individual, classroom, school, district, family, school community) (DePaul et al., 2009; Goodrich et al., 2013) as well as utilize data-driven interventions when offering LGBT-inclusive supports and services to students (Beck, Rausch, & Wood, 2014). Specifically, district and building level climate surveys can provide educators with an opportunity to disaggregate data that can highlight barriers as well as acknowledge practices (i.e., curriculum, policies, GSAs) that positively impact the educational success of LGBT students (Beck, 2016).

Policies and curriculum with specific language and representations regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression issues can also provide critical protection against anti-LGBT youth bullying, harassment, and victimization (Kosciw et al., 2014; Kull, Kosciw, & Greytak, 2015; Snapp et al., 2015a). For example, in schools with a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy, LGBT students report improved levels of self-esteem (Kosciw et al., 2012) as well as hear less harmful language with respect to gender expression (41.7% with a policy and 62.3% without a policy) (Kosciw et al., 2014). Access to inclusive curricular resources and programs that model and welcome the LGBT community has also been cited as instrumental to affirm diversity, dispel hostility (Kosciw et al., 2012) as well as increase safety and overall well-being (Snapp et al., 2015a). Kosciw et al.’s (2012) quantitative study found that

LGBT students report less victimization and higher GPAs when an LGBT-inclusive curriculum was implemented. As such, LGBT-related supports and services can strengthen the protective factors that can bolster LGBT youths' educational success.

Through understanding school climate data and needs of LGBT youth, key educational leaders such as school counselors and administrators, are uniquely positioned to make positive strides in policy, curriculum, and school climate reform for LGBT students. According to authors Ratts and colleagues (2013),

Due to their power and influence, appropriately trained K-12 administrative personnel are positioned to improve their school's climate in meaningful ways; they wield power to determine a school's policy, decide the extent to which LGBTQ programming is implemented, and influence curricula and extracurricular activities. (p. 389)

Likewise, school counselors are both leaders and change agents in the schools (ASCA, 2012; Chen-Hayes & Getch, 2015; Field & Baker, 2004; Mason & McMahon, 2009).

### **School Counselors, Administrators, and LGBT Students**

School counselors and administrators are key educators who can safeguard the rights, safety, and voices of LGBT students. School counselors are uniquely positioned as leaders and change agents in schools due to their training in specific areas such as student development, comprehensive programming, as well as counseling interventions (ASCA, 2012). The American School Counselor Association Competencies (ASCA, 2012) detail the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that ensure school counselors develop diverse and inclusive programming for all students. Specifically, the ASCA Competencies (2012) call upon school counselors to develop interventions (i.e., individual, small-group counseling) that address the needs of marginalized student populations, model and practice ethical behavior, utilize data to address student barriers,

as well as incorporate strategies for collaboration with educational stakeholders such as administrators (ASCA, 2012). The school counseling literature also identifies the role and function of school counselors as advocates and leaders for the development of LGBT-inclusive equitable change in K-12 settings (Beck et al., 2014; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Goodrich et al., 2013; Lassiter & Sifford, 2015; Singh & Burnes, 2009). For example, The American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) position statement on school counselors' service to LGBTQ students states:

School counselors provide support to LGBTQ students to promote academic achievement and personal/social development. School counselors are committed to the affirmation of all youth regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression and work to create safe and affirming schools. (ASCA, 2016a, p. 37)

Further, the visibility of school counselors as LGBT advocates and leaders continues to be transformed from key initiatives with the counseling profession. First, the ASCA National Model (2012) and the American Counseling Association's 2003 advocacy competencies (i.e., client/student, school/community, and public arena) outline advocacy behaviors for school counselors (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2003; Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). Second, specific competencies for work with LGBQQIA students are prescribed from the Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Counseling [ALGBTIC] (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Ally Individuals [LGBQQIA] Competences Task Force, 2013). Scholars also reiterate that creating positive pathways for LGBT students involves intentional collaboration with administrators (Beck, 2016; GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008; Marshall & Hernandez, 2012; Ratts et al., 2013).

Administrators serve in imperative roles through modeling ethical values, developing diverse and inclusive curriculums, cultivating a school community that affirms and respects all student identities, as well as enforcing federal, state, and school district policies (i.e., Title IX, Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Equal Access Act, Statewide School Non-Discrimination Policies) that can impact school climate (National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015; Ratts et al., 2013). Administrators also influence and determine the roles and duties of school counselors, provide support for developmental school counseling programs (Dahir, Burnham, Stone, & Cobb, 2010; Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007), and model critical leadership skills that can facilitate and shape the overall school culture (Beck, 2016; GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008).

The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA, 2015) standards entitled, *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (PSEL), provide expectations and benchmarks regarding how administrators ensure all students, including LGBT students, learn and thrive in a safe and supportive environment. Examples include: (a) develop equitable educational opportunities; (b) provide an inclusive and school climate where all youth are treated fairly and respectfully; (c) ensure all students have access to opportunities; (d) enhance the academic rigor, and social and emotional development of all students; and (e) provide critical support and empathy for all youth regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. Recently, administrators have been called upon to provide fundamental resources and supports that adhere to youths' gender identity (i.e., restrooms and locker rooms, athletics, education records,) (United States Department of Education, 2016).

Conceptual articles acknowledge the significant role that school counselors and administrators play in providing critical resources and supports to LGBT youth (Beck, 2016;

Goodrich et al., 2013; Singh & Burnes, 2009); however, empirical research has yet to address the collaboration between these professionals from an LGBT perspective. Therefore, there is a need for future research that provides a deeper understanding with regard to the relationship experiences of school counselors and administrators in their work for and with LGBT students.

### **School Counselor-Administrator Collaborations**

A rich body of literature addresses barriers to student learning via the systemic collaboration between the school counselor and administrator (ASCA, 2012; Cisler & Bruce, 2012; College Board, 2009a; Dahir, et al., 2010; Dollarhide et al., 2007; Janson, Stone, Clark, 2009). Specifically, the collaborative work between school counselors and administrators can be instrumental in the following arenas, including: (a) school-wide educational efforts (College Board, 2009b); (b) school counselor role clarification (Dahir et al., 2010); (c) promoting student achievement through data-driven practices (Dahir et al., 2010); and (d) developing a shared commitment with respect to student equity (College Board, 2009b; Dahir et al., 2010).

Standards and competencies adopted by the school counseling (ASCA, 2012) and educational leadership (NPBEA, 2015) professions call for intentional collaboration when addressing the unique needs of all students as well as developing a school culture of care. For example, the PSEL (2015; Standard 10.j.) direct administrators to foster and promote leadership among school personnel that can enhance each youth's educational success and well-being (NPBEA, 2015). In addition, the ASCA Competencies (2012; Standard III-C-3.) call upon school counselors to manage (i.e., develop lesson plans to meet a targeted student need, utilize student data to address barriers to student learning, etc.) their school counselor programs through close collaboration with administrators.

Existing studies (College Board, 2009a, 2009b) demonstrate the value and importance of school counselor-administrator relationships. In 2008, the College Board and the National Office for Student Advocacy (NOSCA), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) surveyed over 2,000 school counselors and principals regarding their perceptions of their relationship (College Board, 2009a). Findings revealed four overarching characteristics to a successful school counselor-principal relationship, which include: communication, respect, collaborative decision-making and a shared vision (College Board, 2009a).

Further research done by NOSCA, NASSP, and ASCA involved interviews with seven exemplary school counselor-principal teams to determine whether these professionals had formed an effective working relationship or not (College Board, 2009b). The stories from the dyads provided further direction for how to create an effective working alliance as well as examples of how these professional partners worked through challenges within their relationship. Unfortunately, existing literature that addresses the relationship experiences among school counselors and principals to work with LGBT students is scarce (Beck, 2016). However, findings from the College Board (2009b) study may provide a starting place to address how school counselors and principals can work together in order to address the needs of LGBT students (Beck, 2016).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Due to their roles, school counselors and administrators are uniquely positioned to collaboratively design and implement resources and services that can transform the learning environment for all students (College Board, 2009a), including LGBT youth. The ASCA (2012) and PSEL (NPBEA, 2015) standards both outline the collaborative actions and ethical behavior

of administrators and school counselors to value student diversity, promote equitable and accessible opportunities, develop an inclusive school culture of care, and utilize student data to address challenges and barriers. In addition, ethical and professional responsibilities for work with LGBT students are outlined for both school counselors (ASCA, 2016a, 2016b) and administrators (NPBEA, 2015, Standard 3.e.). Furthermore, the educational literature suggests that effective school counselor-administrator partnerships can be invaluable to student outcomes as well as school reform efforts (ASCA, 2012; Cisler & Bruce, 2012; College Board, 2009a). However, studies have not investigated what an effective school counselor-administrator relationship might look like with regard to developing a safe and inclusive school environment for LGBT students. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and describe the relationships between school counselors and administrators with respect to developing a safe and inclusive school environment for LGBT students.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- a) What are the lived experiences of school counselors and administrators who make concerted efforts to improve the educational environment for LGBT students?
- b) How do school counselors and administrators make meaning with their relationships in their work with LGBT students?

### **Significance of Research**

Scholarship pertaining to the relationship experiences among school counselors and administrators with regard to establishing a safe and affirming school climate for LGBT students is scarce. Findings from this study may provide best practices for how school counselors and administrators can forge a stronger relationship and develop a shared vision towards addressing

the unique needs of LGBT students. Additionally, this study aimed to increase interdisciplinary collaborations with school counselor and educational leadership faculty and students within preparation programs. Specifically, it is hoped that results from this study may help to establish a collaborative climate within preparation programs, where administrator and school counselor trainees can develop ways to enhance role introductions, practice communication strategies, and become more competent with shared decision-making regarding LGBT youth advocacy (Beck, 2016). Lastly, since there is a dearth of literature that has examined how school counselor-administrator teams address (or not) the unique needs of LGBT students, the author anticipates that findings may also impact future research. For example, findings may assist with the development of a survey that identifies the most important elements to a school counselor-administrator relationship that improves student outcomes for LGBT students.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

To ensure consistency, definitions of the following terms used in this dissertation will be outlined below: *LGBT, safe school initiatives, advocacy, leadership for social justice, school counselor, administrator, school climate, and exemplary school counselors and administrators.*

*LGBT*: The term LGBT was used throughout this study to describe the experiences of LGBT K-12 students, unless scholarship and authors specifically addressed this population otherwise. According to the ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce (2013), the term *lesbian* refers to a woman, “who is emotionally, physically, mentally, and/or spiritually oriented to bond and share affection with other women” (p. 42). The term *gay* refers to a man “who is emotionally, physically, mentally, and/or spiritually oriented to bond and share affection with other men. The term *bisexual* refers to a man or woman “who is emotionally, physically, mentally, and/or spiritually oriented to bond and share affection with both men and women”

(ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce, 2013, p. 39). *Transgender* refers to having another gender identity that is not aligned with the sex/gender that individuals were assigned when born and/or whose manner in which they present their gender identity to others is non-conforming (Kosciw et al., 2014).

*Safe School Initiatives:* Safe school initiatives are focused on ensuring that schools provide a safe and positive learning environment for all students. Throughout this study, the term safe school initiatives will include evidence-based programs (i.e., supportive school staff, inclusive curricula, comprehensive anti-bullying policies and procedures, and Gay-Straight Alliances) that have been shown to create a more positive and LGBT-supportive school climate (Kosciw et al., 2014).

*Advocacy:* Advocacy refers to “a person who speaks, writes or acts to promote the well-being of students, parents/guardians and the school counseling profession. School counselors advocate to close the information, opportunity, intervention and attainment gaps for all students” (ASCA, 2016b, p. 9).

*Leadership for Social Justice:* Leadership for social justice refers to addressing and removing marginalized conditions (i.e., race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, etc.) in schools.

*School Climate:* School climate refers to youths’ experiences and perspectives of safety (Kosciw et al., 2014), and the worldviews, traditions, attitudes, and routines within the school building or district (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Throughout this study, the terms school climate, school environment, and school context will be used interchangeably.

*School Counselor:* This study will utilize ASCA’s (2012) definition that school counselors are professionals who hold a master’s degree in school counseling and implement a

developmental and comprehensive data-driven program that promotes the educational success of all student populations (ASCA, 2012).

*Administrator:* According to the PSEL (2015) standards, administrators “relentlessly develop and support teachers, create positive working conditions, effectively allocate resources, construct appropriate organizational policies and systems, and engage in other deep and meaningful work outside of the classroom that has a powerful impact on what happens inside it” (NPBEA, 2015, p.1). In this study, administrator refers to principals, vice principals, associate principals, and assistant principals.

*Exemplary School Counselors and Administrators:* Refers to school counselors and administrators who have been awarded/recognized from a national and/or state level LGBT organization for their work with LGBT students.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter II provides the relevant scholarship to support the foundation of this study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and describe the relationship experiences of school counselor-administrator teams with regard to developing a safe and inclusive school environment for LGBT students. To support this study, literature relevant across the fields of school counseling and educational leadership were examined, discussed, and synthesized to provide a clear rationale and need to investigate the experiences of school counselors and administrators. This review of literature will be divided into the following sections, including: the experiences of LGBT youth in K-12 schools, LGBT-inclusive educational initiatives and policies, the role and function of school counselors and administrators in developing services and programs for LGBT youth, school counselor-administrator relationships, and the role of preparation programs in training school counselors and administrators to work collaboratively towards LGBT student advocacy.

#### **Identifying the Needs of LGBT Youth in Schools**

Research suggests that obtaining an estimate of the number of students who identify as LGBT in K-12 settings is challenging. For example, students' sexual orientation and gender identity as LGBT may not be recognized and/or supported within the context of their school environment (HRC, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2014), which may result in a heightened awareness for youth to limit their self-identification as LGBT. Additionally, authors Goodrich and colleagues (2013) proposed that K-12 conversations that depict topics such as sexual orientation and gender identity can be considered taboo in particular school settings. Further, Savin-Williams and Diamond (2000) report the variance found between youth's first awareness of their sexual

identity (8-11 years) and identification as LGBT (15-17 years), which may add complexity and impact the ability of researchers to accurately locate the number of LGBT students in K-12 settings. As a result, the few studies that focus on the experiences of LGBT students have mainly been conducted with statistics that are gathered with students whom self-identify as LGBT, which may suggest that increased numbers of LGBT youth may not be identified or adequately served (Goodrich & Luke, 2009). Kosciw (2004) proposed that nearly 5% of high school youth disclose being lesbian or gay, which may equate to one LGBT student per high school classroom. DePaul and colleagues (2009) suggested that approximately 5% to 10% of the K-12 student population self-identify as LGBT. Regardless of the number of students who self-identify as LGBT, research clearly articulates that this underserved population experiences increased levels of physical violence, discrimination, and mental health concerns (Kann et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2012; Snapp et al., 2015a).

### **Experiences of LGBT Youth in K-12 Education**

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducts a biennial comprehensive national school climate survey that examines the school experiences and obstacles of LGBT youth in K-12 settings (Kosciw et al., 2014). This nationwide study currently remains as one of the few reports that have longitudinally examined the unique phenomena of LGBT youth experiences (Kosciw et al., 2014). Data from GLSEN's 2013 *National School Climate Survey*, of 7,898 youth between the ages of 13 and 21 highlights how issues of sexual and gender identity, negative school climates, and inclusive LGBT-related supports can directly impact the personal/social, and college and career development of LGBT students (Kosciw et al., 2014). Specifically, Kosciw and colleagues (2014) found that 71.4% of LGBT participants heard anti-LGBT remarks such as "that's so gay." Results also showed that 74.1% of LGBT youth

were harassed verbally, 36.2% of students reported physical harassment and assault, and electronic harassment (i.e., messages on Facebook, text messaging) was cited by 49.0% of LGBT youth participants (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Similarly, the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) (2012) study, *Growing up LGBT in America*, which surveyed 10,030 LGBTQ youth ages 13-17, found that 51% of LGBT students were verbally harassed at school, compared to 25% of their non-LGBT peers. Further, LGBT students were twice as likely to receive physical attacks and assaults when compared to other non-LGBT youth (HRC, 2012). The 2015 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (NYRBS) reported that compared to their non-LGB peers, LGB students experience: (a) sexual dating violence (22.7% LGB vs. 9.1% non-LGB); (b) physical dating violence (17.5 % vs. 8.3% non-LGB); and (c) bullying on school property (34.2% LGB vs. 18.8% non-LGB). Empirical research also demonstrates the negative outcomes for LGBT youth who attend a hostile and negative school climate. A quantitative study conducted by Almeida et al. (2009) found that 31.3% of LGBT students experience discrimination compared to only 3.7% of non-LGBT students. Consistent with these findings, Birkett, Espelage, and Koenig's (2009) study with 7,376 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students found that LGB and sexually questioning students cite increased levels of harassment and victimization than compared to their non-LGB peers.

**Personal and Social Development.** Research demonstrates that bullying and discrimination can directly impact LGBT student's psychological development with depression and decreased levels of self-efficacy and self-worth (Birkett et al., 2009; Marshal et al., 2011; Toomey et al., 2010). Kosciw and colleagues (2012) found that school victimization based on sexual orientation and gender expression predicted lower self-esteem for LGBT students. Existing research also demonstrates that LGBT youth report increased levels of abuse (Garofalo,

Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998), social isolation (Ueno, 2005), and mental health challenges (D'Augelli, Pilkington, Hershberger, 2002). Specifically, data from the 2015 YRBS concluded that LGB students are at greater risks than heterosexual students for engaging in unhealthy behaviors such as tobacco, alcohol, and other drug-related health risks (Kann et al., 2016). Data from this study also found that LGB students are more than 3 times more likely (17.8%) to be physically coerced to have sexual intercourse than heterosexual students (5.4%; Kann et al., 2016). Additionally, the HRC (2012) study found that 52% of LGBT youth report use of alcohol and drugs as compared to 22% of non-LGBT students. Feeling distressed and hopeless can also impact suicidal ideation and suicide attempts for LGBT youth (Kann et al., 2016; Marshal et al., 2011).

Data on the mental health of students indicates that LGBT youth are at heightened risk for depression, suicide, and other violence-related health risks (American Association of Suicidology, n.d.; Kann et al., 2016; Fergusson, Horwood, & Beautrais, 1999; Marshal et al., 2011). For example, Marshal and colleagues (2011) utilized a meta-analysis approach to understand the differences between sexual minority youth and heterosexual youth with respect to suicide and depression. Results showed that 28% of sexual minority youth cited a history of suicidality in contrast to 12% of heterosexual youth (Marshal et al., 2011). The 2015 YRBS found that LGB students were more than 2 times (60.4%) as likely to report feeling sad or hopeless than non-LGB students (26.4%; Kann et al., 2016). The Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey (MYRBS, 2009) reported that 24.7% of GLB youth attempted suicide in the past year compared to 5.6% of non-GLB youth. In addition, GLB students were four times more likely than non-GLB peers to require medical assistance as a result of a suicide attempt (MYRBS, 2009). The evidence is clear that LGBT youth are at risk for emotional distress and

negative psychological outcomes, which may be negatively impacted by hostile school environments. These barriers can also interfere and impact the academic development for LGBT students

**Academic Development.** Research suggests that negative school experiences directly affect LGBT youths' academic achievement (Kann et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2012, 2014; MYRBS, 2009). For example, Kosciw and colleagues (2012) found that a negative and hostile school environment impacts LGBT academic success such as lower GPA's and higher rates of school absenteeism. Similarly, Kosciw and Pizmony-Levy (2016) found that hearing anti-LGBT language and victimization were significantly connected to missed days of school and decreased school belonging of LGBT students. In addition, data from the YRBS (Kann et al., 2016) study found that 12.5 % of LGB youth were absent from school due to safety concerns such as bullying and discrimination. Thus, a hostile and negative school climate can have adverse effects on the academic pathways of LGBT students. Scholarship also articulates that feeling unsupported and unsafe at school can also interfere with youth's college and career development (Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006).

**College and Career Readiness.** Research suggests that negative and hostile school environments can also contribute to lowered college and career aspirations for LGBT students (Kosciw et al., 2014; Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006). For example, Schmidt and Nilsson (2006) found that distress (i.e., social, emotional) related to sexual orientation identity among LGB high school youth predicted career indecisiveness. Schmidt and Nilsson (2006) further proposed that LGB youth face career decision-making challenges, which may result from youth focusing their attention on sexual identity development (i.e., coming out) as compared to their career development (Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006).

Data from GLSEN's (2013) study showed that approximately 9% of LGBT students had not identified a plan for post-secondary education as compared to 4.2% of heterosexual students (Kosciw et al., 2014). Kosciw and colleagues (2014) also found that 35.8% of LGBT school seniors were more attracted to STEM (i.e., science, technology, engineering, or math) subjects in college when secondary curricula had representations of LGBT themes. Conversely, only 18.5% of LGBT youth reported interest in STEM subjects when there were no positive LGBT examples in high school classes (Kosciw et al., 2014). Thus, the lack of role models in specific career arenas can negatively influence the educational and career aspirations of LGBT students (Kosciw et al., 2014). Similarly, in the HRC (2012) report, when youth were asked to explore their most salient concerns facing their lives right now, LGBT youth ranked problems such as non-accepting families, school/bullying problems, and fear of being open to others as the top three ranked problems. However, for non-LGBT peers, students' ranked classes/grades as well as preparing for the transition to college as related concerns (HRC, 2012).

The research summarized above demonstrates that many LGBT students suffer with bullying in the form of harassment and discrimination at school (Kann et al., 2016; HRC, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2014). Victimized LGBT youth, who report their school climate as unsafe, obtain lower grades, miss and/or drop out of school, and are more likely to not have post-secondary education plans (Kann et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2012, 2014; MYRBS, 2009). The literature also addressed that LGBT students report increased levels of depression and are at elevated risk for suicide and other health related outcomes (American Association of Suicidology, n.d.; Kann et al., 2016; Fergusson et al., 1999; Marshal et al., 2011). This gap demonstrates the need for schools to provide school interventions and supports that foster the positive development for all students, including LGBT youth.

## **Current Educational Initiatives, Policy, and Law**

Despite the obstacles and adversity faced by many LGBT youth, a growing body of scholarship indicates the ways in which resources and services can positively benefit all youth. Examples include: Supportive educators (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2012), inclusive curriculum (Kosciw et al., 2012, 2014), and Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) (Saewyc, Konishi, Rose, & Homma, 2014; Walls et al., 2010). In addition, LGBT youth report increased levels of safety and preparedness to learn when inclusive federal, state, and district level laws (i.e., Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Title IX, Equal Access Act, Statewide School Non-Discrimination Policies) are implemented in schools (Kosciw et al., 2012; Kull et al., 2015; Saewyc et al., 2014). This next section will discuss the current state of educational initiatives, policy, and laws that endorse how school personnel must work in a purposeful manner to support LGBT students.

**Supportive Educators.** Research demonstrates that an increased presence of supportive educators can benefit LGBT students (Kosciw et al., 2012). Kosciw and colleagues (2012) quantitative study with 5,730 LGBT students found that educator support was a strong protective factor with lowered victimization, increased self-esteem, higher GPAs, and lower absenteeism. Consistent with these results, data from GLSEN's (2013) study found that when LGBT youth identify 11 or more supportive educators at their school, youth report decreased levels of feeling unsafe than compared with limited supportive personnel (36.3% vs. 74.1%) (Kosciw et al., 2014). Conversely, efforts by school personnel to identify as positive allies and supports for LGBT youth is incompatible within the literature.

Research suggests that some educators are fearful of addressing LGB topics (Valenti & Campbell, 2009), lack awareness and LGB competency (Farmer, Welfare, & Burge, 2013;

Varjas, Mahan, Meyers, Birckbichler, Lopp, & Dew, 2007), and intervention (Kosciw et al., 2014; Snapp et al., 2015a) when LGBT students are targets of bullying and harassment. For example, Varjas and colleagues (2007) found that school and community service providers cited barriers for GLB students. Examples include: passive educators, a religious school climate, and victim blaming (Varjas et al., 2007). Research also suggests that educators, including school counselors and administrators, may experience adversity and resistance when engaged in creating a positive and affirming climate for LGBT youth (Curry & Hayes, 2009; GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008; Jennings, 2014).

A conceptual article written by Curry and Hayes (2009) explored the first author's experience as a school counselor advocate for LGBT youth. Specifically, when Curry asked her administrator for support and approval in establishing a Gay-Straight-Alliance (GSA) for her LGBT students, she was told, "We can't do that. Parents will think we are turning their kids gay" (Curry & Hayes, 2009, p. 11). Drawing on data from *The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment*, GLSEN & Harris Interactive (2008) found that 71% of principals believe that their district-level administration would be supportive of their LGBT efforts; however, only 57% of principals believed that school board members and 46% of community members would support their leadership efforts to develop LGBT affirming spaces at school. Despite these barriers on the part of educators in their work with LGBT students, scholarship also describes the benefits for LGBT youth when educators incorporate positive representations of LGBT individuals in classroom discussions and curriculum (Kosciw et al., 2014).

**Curriculum Reform.** Research demonstrates that LGBT youth experience safer and positive school climates when students are provided with affirming examples of LGBT topics in curriculum and school-wide programming (Kosciw et al., 2012, 2014). Ensuring access to

resources that address LGBT diversity such as positive examples of LGBT individuals, history, and gender differences in college and career readiness planning have positively affected youths' academic outcomes and overall well being (Kosciw et al., 2012, 2014). Specifically, Kosciw and colleagues (2012) found that LGBT-inclusive curriculum was predictive of increased GPA's for LGBT students. However, results indicated that curriculum was not predictive of self-esteem and absenteeism for LGBT youth (Kosciw et al., 2012).

Results from a qualitative study with 26 high school students found that an LGBTQ-inclusive curricula can have positive benefits for LGBT students, including: safety, well-being, academics, and school connectedness (Snapp et al., 2015a). Unfortunately, some research suggests that schools deny access to inclusive representation as well as opportunities for LGBT students to express their identity in curriculum and school programs; thus, sending an “an alienating message of denial and despair” (Frank & Cannon, 2009, p. 10). For example, GLSEN's (2013) study found that 17.5% of LGBT youth were disallowed from communicating or writing about LGBT themes in academic assignments as well as nearly 10% of youth shared that they were reprimanded for being LGBT (Kosciw et al., 2014). Research also indicates that the presence of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) can be an influential strategy to bolster support and safety for LGBT students.

**Gay-Straight Alliances.** According to Bidell (2011), “GSAs are student-led non-curricular groups that provide support and advocacy for LGBTQ middle and high school students as well as their allies” (p. 2). Prior research demonstrates that GSAs can be instrumental in buffering the effects of a negative and hostile school climate (Kosciw et al., 2012, 2014). For example, Walls et al. (2010) found that LGBT student participation in GSAs is connected to decreased absenteeism and increased levels of student safety and academic outcomes. Kosciw et

al. (2012) found that having a GSA in school correlates to decreased levels of anti-LGBT victimization. GLSEN's (2013) study found that LGBT students report feeling more safe and connected at school (64.4%) with a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) or similar group than compared to schools without a GSA (46.0%) (Kosciw et al., 2014). Moreover, GSAs can be an influential intervention for educators to help LGBT students build a "stronger sense of belonging to their school community" (Bidell, 2011, p. 11).

The literature also discussed the role and function of organizations that support and provide leadership to schools regarding how to start and sustain a peer group for LGBT students and allies. For example, the Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network) facilitates leadership and support to over 900 GSAs across the state of California and also connects 40 statewide coalitions of GSA clubs across the United States (Gay-Straight Alliance Network, n.d.). Support from national organizations such as the GSA Network and GLSEN can be instrumental in helping school districts enact safer spaces for all students.

Conversely, there are school buildings where GSAs have been disallowed. A qualitative study by Lassiter and Sifford (2015) examined the experiences of school counselors who held positions in a school building that prohibited a GSA. Findings from the stories of five school counselors indicated that the ban excluded affirming supports and services to LGBTQQ students, while also emphasizing the importance of proactive intervention and advocacy (Lassiter & Sifford, 2015). In February 1996, the Salt Lake City School District disallowed all extra-curricular youth clubs as a strategy to ban a GSA from forming at Park City High School (GLSEN, 2014). The work of the Park City High GSA is noteworthy, especially given the legal challenges and adversity that occurred with GSAs forming within the state of Utah. For example, the Park City High GSA was awarded the 2014 GLSEN GSA award for working to erase anti-

LGBT legislation, facilitating community activities with LGBT representation, and teaming with local newspapers on safe school initiatives (GLSEN, 2014). Hence, some school communities continue to deny LGBT students the critical resources and interventions (see Beck et al., 2014) that have been proven to increase school success for LGBT students (Kosciw et al., 2014).

**Federal and State Laws.** An additional topic discussed in the literature is the legal safeguards to protect LGBT students at the federal and state level. These laws include Title IX and the First and 14<sup>th</sup> Clause Amendments of the United States Constitution (Goodrich et al., 2013; Lambda Legal, n.d.a). Specifically, Title IX, established in 1972, promotes equal access in education programs that receive “federal financial assistance based on sex” and when a “student’s gender presentation does not conform to stereotype expectations of male or female (Goodrich et al., 2013, p. 311-312). In addition, the constitutional right for LGBT students to speak and express their identity has provided legal challenges for some school districts. For example, the First Amendment was successfully adapted to court cases such as *Henkle v. Gregory*, 2001, where a ninth grade student in Reno, Nevada experienced discrimination and harassment based on his sexual orientation (Lambda Legal, n.d.a). Rather than disciplining the offenders, school officials transitioned the student to an alternative school, where bullying and harassment continued. Consequently, the student received \$451,000 in damages and the school was ordered to adopt policies that protect youth from harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation (Lambda Legal, n.d.a). Additional laws such as the Equal Access Act also highlight how schools must provide equal access to activities that support LGBT youth such as GSAs (Goodrich et al., 2013).

Although these federal laws make profound gains to protect a safe and healthy environment for LGBT students, obstacles to adopt LGBT-welcoming policies remain. Recently,

the U.S. Senate's vote on June 14, 2015, to not specifically protect LGBT students on the Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA) as an addition to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), draws further attention to the work needed among educational stakeholders to provide a safe and equitable school climate for all students, including LGBT youth (GLSEN, 2015). In addition to the aforementioned federal obligations, states and school districts have also enacted specific protections for LGBT students.

**Comprehensive Anti-bullying Policies.** At the state level, an increasing number of school districts have adopted specific anti-bullying policies that support LGBT youth. Currently, 18 states have safe school anti-bullying laws that protect students based on sexual orientation and gender identity. These states include: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington (GLSEN, n.d.). Specifically, the state of California has made positive strides towards the protection against bullying and harassment of LGBT students. For example, in 2012, the California Department of Education passed legislation (i.e., Seth's Law, AB9) that mandates each California school district to acquire a policy that forbids bullying and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender, or gender expression (Lambda Legal, n.d.b). Recently, in May of 2015, the Washoe County School District (Nevada), adopted new policies that provide specific protections for transgender students such as dress code, bathroom usage, and athletics for transgender students (MyNews4, 2015). Similar legislation has been introduced in other states. Specifically, bill A3380 in the state of New Jersey, would demand schools to incorporate instruction on LGBT topics.

Research shows that schools with a comprehensive bullying policy that includes protections for sexual orientation and gender identity/expression results in youth feeling more

safe and connected to their school (Kosciw et al., 2012, 2014; Kull et al., 2015; Saewyc et al., 2014). Examples of LGBT policy-making efforts offered in the literature, include: anti-bullying and nondiscrimination policies (i.e., district, state, and national) that include both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, professional training mandates for school personnel on bullying, accountability guidelines for reporting bullying situations, and protections for transgender students in use of bathrooms and locker rooms (Goodrich et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2014; Kull et al., 2015; Singh & Burnes, 2009). Saewyc and colleagues (2014) found that comprehensive anti-bullying policies in schools resulted in decreased discrimination and risk behaviors (suicide ideation and attempts) when these policies were implemented for at least three years. Kosciw et al. (2012) found that comprehensive anti-bullying/ harassment policies correlated with LGBT student self-esteem. These results are also consistent with GLSEN's (2013) findings that LGBT youth hear less derogatory language (i.e., that's so gay) (59.2% with a policy and 80.2% without a policy) and that school personnel respond more when hearing anti-LGBT remarks in school (Kosciw et al., 2014). While an increasing body of literature highlights the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies, not all LGBT youth attend a school climate that is bully-free (Ratts et al., 2013).

Research suggests that too many school districts miss the mark to provide anti-bullying protections for LGBT youth; even when state laws are in place. Specifically, GLSEN's 2015 study, *From Statehouse to Schoolhouse: Anti-Bullying Policy Efforts in U.S. States and School Districts*, examined the anti-bullying procedures and policies in all U.S. public school districts from September 2008 through March 2011 (Kull et al., 2015). Data indicated that only 9.9% of school districts have a policy that includes language and protections for students based upon their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. In states with anti-bullying policies that

include protections for LGBT youth, 38.7% of school districts were not incorporating policies to protect students based on sexual orientation and 60.3% were not incorporating policies to youth based on gender identity/expression (Kull et al., 2015).

Obstacles also exist within states that do not provide protection for LGBT youth based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. As previously noted, North Carolina prohibits transgender youth to utilize restrooms and school facilities that align with their gender identity. Similar legislation was introduced in states such as South Dakota and Georgia, but did not pass. Goodrich and colleagues (2013) cite the failed bill, “Don’t Say Gay,” which would have prohibited educators in the state of Tennessee to discuss LGBT topics in the classroom. Additionally, the state of Georgia has scant language in bullying policies that promote safety on issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (Singh & Harper, 2013).

In this section, research related to LGBT-inclusive supports and services that improve the safety of all youth was examined. Specifically, research calls upon schools to provide youth clubs that incorporate topics for LGBT students, increase the support from staff, develop curricular resources with LGBT representation, and implement educational policies that target bullying and discrimination (Kosciw et al., 2014). Among the findings to increase school climate and safety for LGBT students, research also suggests that not all schools emphasize and address the bullying concerns that too many LGBT students face (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008 Kosciw et al., 2012). Research in this section also underscored the barriers and obstacles (i.e., resistance, fear, lack of school policies) that school counselors and administrators may encounter in their work to develop a more inclusive school climate (Curry & Hayes, 2012; Valenti & Campbell, 2009). Nevertheless, further research is needed regarding how school counselors and administrators work collaboratively, as a strategy to work through adversity and bolster the

critical support and advocacy needed for an LGBT-welcoming school climate. As such, the behaviors and actions specific to the role and function of school counselors and administrators can be critical in establishing positive and safe learning environments for all students, including LGBT youth.

### **The Role and Function of School Counselors**

School counselors are uniquely positioned and trained to develop a school climate that promotes educational success for all students (ASCA, 2012; Singh and Harper, 2013). According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), the leading national organization that promotes the work of school counselors:

School counselors are certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career and personal/social development needs by designing, evaluating, and enhancing, a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances school success.

(ASCA, n.d.)

ASCA (2016a) also informs school counselors of their role and responsibility to assist LGBTQ students with feelings about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity as well as advocate for equitable programming and activities. In efforts to strengthen school counseling scholarship available on components of safe schools for LGBT students, a special issue of the *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling* was published in 2013. In this special issue, authors focused on the role and function of the professional counselor in creating safe schools for LGBT youth through preparation and “systemic change interventions” (Singh & Harper, 2013, p. 303). According to ASCA (2012), ensuring that all students have access to equitable learning opportunities (i.e., rigorous curriculum, extracurricular) requires collaboration between the school counselor and

multiple stakeholders, including administrators. To support a collaborative relationship between school counselors and administrators with respect to LGBT students, a review of literature on the roles, function, and professional responsibilities of each professional team member will be discussed in the following sections.

**The ASCA National Model.** In order to help school counselors transition from providing services to a small number of students to comprehensive programming for all students, ASCA published, “The ASCA National Model: A Framework for school Counseling Programs” in 2003. This model specifically details the role and function of school counselors (Erford, 2015). A second edition was released in 2005 and the latest edition was published in 2012 (ASCA, 2012). Embedded within ASCA’s National Model are the School Counselor Competencies, which detail the knowledge, abilities, dispositions necessary for school counselors to develop comprehensive and developmental programs for all students (ASCA, 2012).

The School Counselor Competencies guide school counselors to develop dispositions that every student can learn and have equitable access to high quality learning (ASCA, 2012, I-C-1-2.) as well as incorporate differentiated interventions and programs to meet the needs of all students (ASCA, 2012, IV-B-1d.). This framework also calls upon school counselors to utilize data-skills that examine the connection between social/emotional concerns and academic outcomes for all students (ASCA, 2012, III-B-6d.) and engage in systemic collaboration with administrators (ASCA, 2012, IV-B-6a.). The ASCA National Model framework (2012) also contains four main components (i.e., Foundation, Management, Delivery, and Accountability), which are surrounded by four themes (i.e., leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change) that highlight the role of school counselors (ASCA, 2012). This next section will discuss the ASCA National Model central components of Foundation, Management, Delivery, and

Accountability, as specific to the role and function of school counselors' work with LGBT students.

**Foundation.** The foundation section of the ASCA National Model (2012) describes what the school counseling program will look like in future years (i.e., vision statement). The program's vision statement results from school counselors examining their own personal attitudes towards how students are different as a result of their school counseling program, student competencies (i.e., academic, personal/social and college and career readiness), and competencies specific to the role of the school counselor (ASCA, 2012; Erford, 2015).

Conceptual articles provide school counselors with strategies to bolster a more positive and safe school climate for LGBT youth. For example, Goodrich & Luke (2009) and ASCA (2016a) recommend that school counselors review and introduce LGBT-welcoming language within school counseling program vision and mission statements. According to ASCA's (2016a) position statement, school counselors should develop program goals that strive for positive outcomes for LGBT students such as increasing personal safety, college and career readiness, academic success, etc. Further, ASCA (2016a) calls upon school counselors to work individually with LGBT students as well as collaborate with community personnel to address the personal and social needs of youth.

**Management.** School counselors can also integrate assessments and tools that consider and address the needs of marginalized student populations (ASCA, 2012). According to Young, Millard, and Kneale (2013), the management component "addresses *when, why, and under what authority* the program is implemented" (p. 257). ASCA (2012) indicates that management tools can help data-driven school counseling programs improve the student success for all students. Examples include: programmatic and school counselor time assessments, annual agreements

between the school counselor and principal, data collection and identification measures to address systemic barriers, as well as action plans (i.e., curriculum, small-group, and closing-the-gap) that outline recommendations for improving student success.

Scholars writing on the topic of school counselors and LGBT youth are transparent regarding the importance of organizational tools to create safer learning environments for LGBT youth (Beck et al., 2014; Goodrich & Luke, 2009). For example, Goodrich and Luke (2009) recommend that school counselors examine annual agreements with administrators and action plans for “their use of LGBTQ inclusive language” (p. 120). In addition, these authors propose that school counselors utilize data to assess how their schools and programs address the unique needs of LGBT students. The literature also recommends that school counselors conduct and interpret school climate surveys (ASCA, 2012), track the attendance and academic rates of LGBT youth (ASCA, 2012), and facilitate pre-and post-tests within classroom guidance lessons to determine whether or not students have learned how to respond to anti-LGBT bullying and harassment. Goodrich and Luke (2009) suggest that school counselors disaggregate data (i.e., results report, action plans, school counselor performance standards, program audit) that specifically aims to close the gap for LGBT student populations.

***The Delivery System.*** The delivery section of the ASCA National Model (2012) encompasses the strategies and services that school counselors employ to deliver the “how” of the school counseling program to all students (ASCA, 2012; Erford, 2015; Young et al., 2013). Thus, school counselors utilize direct services such as in-person communications between school counselors and students, classroom instructional lessons, assist students with personal and career plans, as well as provide individual and small group counseling services (ASCA, 2012). According to Young et al. (2013), school counselors also collaborate with families, teachers, and

administrators, and with other educational stakeholders regarding community resources, behavior management strategies, referrals, and professional development that advocates on behalf of the student. Drawing from the ASCA National Model (2012) and existing scholarship, this next section will highlight how school counselors incorporate programmatic components to discern a safe and respectful learning environment for LGBT students.

**Curriculum.** Delivered by school counselors and/or coordinated with teachers, classroom instructional lessons can address and introduce specific LGBT topics such as becoming an ally, self-esteem, gender roles, relationships, stigma, and positive role models (Goodrich & Luke, 2009). According to ASCA (2012), “Issues relevant to LGBTQ students are appropriate for many curriculum lessons delivered by school counselors as a part of the school counseling core curriculum” (p. 35). Goodrich and Luke’s (2009) developed the model, “LGBT Responsive School Counseling,” to assist school counselors in representing LGBT inclusivity throughout their program as well as how to collaborate and educate stakeholders (i.e., teachers, parents, administrators, community members) regarding LGBT-inclusive curricula. However, studies have not measured the effectiveness of this model for school counselors in their work to promote LGBT-inclusiveness.

**Counseling.** School counselors also develop individual and group interventions to meet the unique needs of LGBT students. When working individually or in a group setting, Beck and coauthors (2014) conceptual article called upon school counselors to utilize children’s stories such as *The Family Book* by Parr (2003) to teach acceptance towards LGBT students and families at the elementary level. When assisting LGBT students in developing college and career goals, the ASCA National Model (2012) recommends that school counselors share resources on

“LGBTQ-friendly colleges, listings of scholarships for LGBTQ students, Fortune 500 companies that value LGBTQ employees and other LGBTQ-focused resources” (pg. 35).

**Accountability.** School counselors demonstrate the effectiveness of their interventions through continuous program evaluation and outcome research (i.e., achievement, behavior, attendance, school climate program results) (ASCA, 2012). According to ASCA (2012), “To achieve the best results for students, school counselors regularly evaluate their program to determine its effectiveness” (p. 99). Whiston and Quinby (2009) found that students who engage in school counseling interventions scored higher on outcome measures compared to students who did not partake in services provided by school counselors. Carey, Harrington, Marin, & Hoffman (2012) examined the evaluation of school counseling programs in Nebraska high schools. Results indicated that incorporating components of the ASCA National Model (2012) correlated with positive student outcomes. According to ASCA (2012), examining curriculum and small-group results reports and monitoring the progress of perceptions and behaviors of LGBT students (i.e., school climate surveys, pre and post tests) can provide outcome data to enhance the services that LGBT youth receive. School counselors also work with multiple stakeholders and especially families to strengthen the services that they provide to LGBT students.

**Consulting and Collaborating with Families.** Research demonstrates that increased social support (i.e., families, friends, administrators) to LGBT students can have positive results for students (D’Augelli, 2006; Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2014; Shilo & Savaya, 2011; Snapp et al., 2015b). Eisenberg and Resnick (2006) found that family support and adult understanding were significantly protective against attempts of suicide by GLB youth. Snapp and colleagues (2015b) examined the positive role of social support of 245 LGBT youth and young adults. Results indicate that family and community support correlated with positive outcomes

(i.e., self-esteem, self-worth) for LGBT youth. As such, school counselors can play a critical role in supporting LGBT students through consulting and collaborating with families. According to Erford (2015),

Consultation and collaboration are cooperative processes in which the professional school counselor (serving in the role of consultant) helps others in the school community to think through problems and to develop skills that make them more effective in working with students. (p. 35)

Conceptual articles provide school counselors with LGBT-inclusive strategies to strengthen their consultation and collaboration services with families. Examples include: developing a list of LGBT-welcoming resources for families of LGBT students (Singh and Burnes, 2009), offering community groups for parents such as Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (ASCA, 2012), and connecting students and families to mental health, crisis, and suicide intervention resources such as The Trevor Project. Scholars also suggest that school counselors can assist families through learning about the coming out process (Goodrich et al., 2013) and creating lists of faith-based LGBT-welcoming organizations and policies (Goodrich et al., 2013).

The literature summarized above supports the critical role of school counselors to utilize the ASCA National Model (2012) to help all youth achieve academic, personal/social, and career success. Research also identifies the intentional efforts by school counselors to develop school/family partnerships, which is particularly important for families with LGBT youth (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Snapp et al., 2015b). While an increasing body of scholarship acknowledges the impact of school counselors on student outcomes (Carey et al., 2012; Whiston & Quinby, 2009), there is limited outcome data to support the effectiveness of the aforementioned LGBT-related programs and supports from a school counseling lens. Hence,

empirical research is needed to address the value and impact of school counseling interventions with respect to LGBT students' academic, college and career, and personal/social development. This next section will examine scholarship that has called for school counselors to lead as advocates and ensure that all students have access to a safe, diverse, and rigorous data-driven school counseling program (ASCA, 2012).

### **School Counselor Advocacy and Leadership**

Scholars suggest that advocacy and leadership are intertwined (Chen-Hayes & Getch, 2015) and increasingly acknowledged as essential tasks for school counselors (ASCA, 2012; Field & Baker, 2004). Initiated efforts led by the ASCA (2012) and other key school counseling reformers (i.e., Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2007; House & Hayes, 2002; Ratts et al., 2007; Trusty & Brown, 2005) have positioned school counselors to lead “school transformation at the local, state, regional, and national levels” (Curry & DeVoss, 2009, p. 64). According to Mason and McMahon (2009), leadership is a complex concept that encompasses more than administration hierarchies and includes skills, collaboration, and processes. ASCA (2012) conceptualizes leadership as a process that produces a common goal (Northouse, 2007) and inspires others' to distribute their knowledge and perspectives via teaching (Tichy, 2004). ASCA (2012) also identifies four leadership contexts as developed by Bolman and Deal (2008) that can be adapted to comprehensive school counseling programs. These leadership arenas are as follows: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Leadership can also serve as a critical foundation for other school counselor skills such as advocacy (Mason & McMahon, 2009).

Within the school counseling literature, advocacy is often connected to social justice issues. Examples include increasing access and equity for all students (Ratts et al., 2007),

acknowledging and addressing how environmental elements can serve as obstacles to student learning (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Chen-Hayes & Getch, 2015), and challenging the status quo for marginalized student populations such as youth of color and poverty (Bemak & Chung, 2008). Within the ASCA National Model (2012), advocacy behaviors and competencies for school counselor advocates are prescribed. These include: Advocacy for all student groups, knowledge of advocacy models, as well as collaborating with multiple stakeholders to ensure the needs of underserved populations are addressed within the school counseling program (ASCA, 2012). In addition, scholars call upon school counselors to have effective relational skills and leadership (Dahir & Stone, 2012), to acknowledge their own personal attitudes and biases when incorporating culturally responsive advocacy efforts (Chen-Hayes & Getch, 2015), and to understand the role of power and the inner workings of school systems (ASCA, 2012; Trusty & Brown, 2005).

Due to the configuration of school as systems and multiple subsystems (i.e., parents, teachers, board members, students), some authors (Bemak & Chung, 2008) have noted barriers and obstacles to the work of school counselors in promoting educational equity and access for all youth. In particular, Bemak and Chung's (2008) conceptual article acknowledged and explored the potential personal (i.e., fear, lack of risk taking) as well as the organizational barriers (i.e., non-tenure school counselors, limited support from school stakeholders) that may exist for school counselors when advocating for social justice issues in schools. The authors developed the term 'Nice Counselor Syndrome' to highlight these challenges that school counselors may face in their quest for equity-based programming (Bemak & Chung, 2008).

Despite the importance of advocacy and leadership found in the literature, few empirical studies have explored the practices of school counselor leadership and advocacy. Field and Baker

(2004) examined the advocacy perspectives and behaviors of school counselors through focus group methodology. Participants in this study characterized advocacy as “going the extra mile” for youth, which involves collaboration with multiple school stakeholders, and requires support from school administration (Field & Baker, 2004). Singh, Urbano, Haston, and McMahan (2010) conducted a qualitative study examining the social justice strategies that 16 school counselors utilized within their school setting. Findings included: (a) developing political savvy to confront power structures; (b) broaching challenging conversations; (c) developing relationships; (d) teaching self-advocacy skills to students; (e) incorporating data-driven practices; and (f) informing others about the school counselor role and function as advocate (Singh et al., 2010). McMahan, Singh, Urbano, and Haston (2010) examined the racial, feminist, and advocacy identity formation with respect to the worldviews and attitudes (i.e., personhood) of 16 school counselor advocates. This study in particular found that school counselors purposefully incorporate aspects of self (i.e., values, beliefs) when advocating for change in their schools.

With respect to leadership, Dollarhide, Gibson, and Saginak (2008) facilitated a qualitative study regarding the successes and obstacles of five new school counselors. School counselors who reported success took ownership for their leadership, obtained support from others, viewed resistance as an opportunity for growth, and identified strategies to increase their leadership skills (Dollarhide et al., 2008). Mason and McMahon (2009) investigated key components of leadership practices in their study with 305 school counselors. Findings suggest that age, experience, and size of school can be integral factors in the facilitation of school counselor leadership (Mason & McMahon, 2009). Specific frameworks and competencies within the school counseling arena also value and acknowledge that leadership and advocacy are requisite tasks for the 21<sup>st</sup> century school counselor.

**Advocacy Frameworks.** To reinforce the behaviors and skills of counselors as advocates and leaders, the American Counseling Association’s Advocacy Competencies were developed by Lewis and colleagues in 2003. According to this framework, there are three categories where counselors work to create a positive status quo: client/student, school/community and public arena advocacy (Ratts et al., 2007). In addition, there are two levels within each category, where counselor behaviors become more fluid between ‘acting with’ and ‘acting on behalf’ across the client/student, school/community, and public arena advocacy categories (Lewis et al., 2003; Ratts et al., 2007). Toporek and colleagues (2009) conceptualized these competencies “as the ability, understanding, and knowledge to carry out advocacy ethically and effectively” (p. 87). In efforts to extend and tailor the ACA Advocacy Competencies to the work of school counselors, in 2007, Ratts et al. outlined the knowledge and skills needed as related to the daily life of a school counselor. In addition, Trusty and Brown (2005) prescribed competencies for school counselors that included dispositions, knowledge, and essential skills for school counselors to elicit change within K-12 settings. Collectively, these advancements helped position school counselors as educational leaders and advocates in support of the academic, personal/social, and college and career readiness development of all student populations (ASCA, 2012).

In efforts to appropriately and ethically meet the needs of LGBT youth, professional organizations and scholars provide recommendations to assist school counselors in the promotion of LGBT-inclusive school climates. The American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014), the American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2012, 2016a, 2016b), and the Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling (ALGBTIC, 2013) provide guidelines with specific mention to LGBT populations within their professional documents.

## **Professional and Ethical Responsibilities for LGBT Youth Advocacy**

Recent court cases (i.e., *Ward v. Wilbanks* (2010), *Ward v. Polite* (2012), & *Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley* (2011), involving two school counseling trainees who refused to work with LGBT students, have strengthened the need for clarification within the ethical mandates for school counselors' in their service and responsibility to support LGBT student populations. Court rulings such as *Nguon vs. Wolf* (ACLU, 2007) have also highlighted the ethical responsibilities of school counselors and their work with administrators regarding LGBT issues (ACLU, 2007). In this case, a senior at Santiago High School (California), was disciplined for displaying public affection towards her girlfriend while at school (ACLU, 2007). The student claimed that the principal violated her privacy rights by revealing the gender of her girlfriend to her parents. While the courts ruled that the administrator did not violate her rights under the Equal Protection and First Amendment, this court case provides further implications for both school counselors and principals (ACLU, 2007). For example, in the July/August 2014 edition of ASCA's *School Counselor* magazine, Stone (2014) adapted this court case into an ethical scenario involving the work of school counselors and principals. Professional organizations have also outlined ethical behaviors and mandates to guide school counselors in their work with LGBT students.

**Ethical Frameworks and Competencies.** The American Counseling Association (ACA) (2014) Ethical Code A.4.b "Personal Values" articulates that counselors are not only self-aware of their "values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors," but avoid enforcing their values onto diverse clients, "especially when the counselor's values are inconsistent with the client's goals or are discriminatory in nature (p. 5). Similarly, the (2016b) *Ethical Standards for School Counselors* states that school counselors:

Respect students' and families values, beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identification/expression and cultural background and exercise great care to avoid imposing personal beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture or ethnicity. (p. 1)

ASCA's (2016b) *Ethical Standards* also call upon school counselors to develop school climates that are respectful and free from bullying and discrimination based on students' sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

In addition, the ASCA (2016a) position statement describes the school counselor's role and service to LGBTQ youth such. Examples include: Support youth with feelings about their sexual orientation and gender identity, advocate for inclusive school and extracurricular activities, and incorporate LGBTQ-inclusive supports (i.e., GSA) and professional trainings. The third edition of the ASCA National model (2012) also offers a specific section devoted to the work of school counselors with LGBT students (Smith, 2013). According to ASCA (2012), "Implementing the ASCA National Model while considering LGBTQ students' unique needs will create a safer, and more welcoming and inclusive school climate" (p. 36). ASCA's (2012) latest edition also infuses specific language for LGBTQ populations (i.e., queer, transgender) and recommends school-wide program activities such as National Coming Out Day and LGBT History Month.

Lastly, the Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling (ALGBTIC) (2013) developed two sections of competencies that can also assist school counselors in their work with LGBT students. The first set provides recommendations for practitioners as well as training programs when school counselors work with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, and Questioning individuals, which adhere to the 2009 CACREP categories (i.e., human growth and development, social and cultural foundations, helping relationships,

group work, professional orientation and ethical practice, career and lifestyle development, assessment, and research and program evaluation). The last section provides guidance for counselors themselves who self-identify as allies with specific recommendations for working with individuals who disclose as allies to LGBT individuals.

Taken together, the aforementioned school counselor advocacy frameworks (Lewis et al., 2003; Ratts et al., 2007) as well as ethical and professional responsibilities (ASCA, 2016a, 2016b) articulate the clear need for school counselors to develop school environments that support all students, including LGBT youth. Additionally, court cases have modeled that LGBT students cannot be treated differently as a result of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression (ACLU, 2007); thus, highlighting the ethical and legal responsibility of school counselors to take a stand. Drawing upon these findings, the work of school counselors as advocates and leaders for LGBT youth does not happen independently and requires collaboration with key leaders such as administrators. Hence, there remains limited guidance within the literature to assist and support school counselors in how to work with administrators towards the implementation of the aforementioned LGBT-affirmative mandates. This is concerning given ASCA's (2012) recommendation and statement that "the entire school community must work together to create schools that are physically and emotionally safe for all" and that "the relationship among collaborators is a critical element for effective collaboration" (p. 7 & 17). Therefore, to move in this direction, this next session will examine the role of the administrator in regards to creating a diverse and safe educational environment for all student populations.

### **Educational Leadership**

The leadership role played by administrators can be critical for establishing a robust and affirming environment that reflects the obstacles and opportunities facing students, faculty and

staff, and school communities (National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015). Administrators have an imperative role in providing equitable activities, supports, and resources that address the safety and unique needs of youth from diverse backgrounds and identities, such as LGBT students (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008; NPBEA, 2015). In this section, the author will review literature on the role and function of administrators as leaders for social justice and for the educational success and well-being of all students, including LGBT youth.

**The Role and Function of Administrators.** To create effective and positive school environments that align to each youth’s learning (NPBEA, 2015), the administrator’s role covers many diverse areas. These include: address barriers to student learning, support teacher development and evaluation, oversee school operations and resources (i.e., human resources, public relations), develop and design rigorous curriculum and instruction, design organizational policies and procedures, implement safe and positive working climates, organize and monitor the establishment of school improvement goals, and bolster a professional community of care through partnerships with teachers and professional members (NPBEA, 2015).

The National Policy Board for Educational Administration, a consortium of professional educational organizations (NPBEA, 2015) outlines professional standards that guide and support the values and work of administrators. Notably, the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (PSEL) Standards provide a holistic view with respect to how administrators enhance the academic rigor, social and emotional development, as well as the critical support and empathy necessary for all youth to reach educational success (NPBEA, 2015). The PSEL (NPBEA, 2015) Standards model a “positive approach to leadership that is optimistic, emphasizes development and strengths, and focuses on human potential” (p. 3). In the following

sections, the PSEL Standards will be interwoven with additional research and culturally responsive practices to provide a systemic understanding of the role and function of administrators with respect to LGBT students.

**Ethical Leadership and School Climate.** The values and beliefs that school administrators emphasize and the actions they model can be critical for establishing a safe and supportive climate for all students, including LGBT youth. The PSEL (NPBEA, 2015) Standards 1, 2, 3, and 10 emphasize the values, ethics, and cultural competencies of administrators to effectively lead and advocate for the academic and well-being of each student. Administrators create an inclusive school climate where each student is treated respectfully and with “an understanding of each student’s culture and context” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11). Specifically, the PSEL Standards (NPBEA, 2015) state that administrators: promote equity/inclusion and social justice (Standard 1.c.), place children at the forefront of education (Standard 2.c.) value democracy, diversity, and fairness (Standard 2.b.), as well as encourage school-wide leadership with teachers, staff and faculty (Standard 10.j.). Administrators also serve as professional models for behaviors they wish to see in others.

Fullan (2002) described the role of principals as leaders with a moral compass, which guides and impacts the behaviors of school leaders to create positive school environments.

According to Baker and Gerler (2004),

Principals clearly influence the environment in their schools. What they value most will influence their own behavior and what they reinforce positively or negatively in the values and behaviors of their subordinates in their school rules, and in the assignment of responsibilities in their purview. (p. 353)

Administrators develop an inclusive school environment through partnering with school stakeholders, such as teachers and families. The PSEL Standards (NPBEA, 2015) establish how administrators develop supportive professional cultures and foster leadership behaviors with teachers, staff, and families (Standard 6.g.). For example, Standard 4 articulates that administrators work with teachers to ensure that instructional and assessment (i.e., data collection, progress monitoring) strategies are “authentic to student experiences, recognizes student strengths, and is differentiated and personalized” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 12). The literature also identifies the importance for administrators to address issues of equity and justice in schools.

**Leadership for Social Justice.** Social justice scholars call upon administrators to eradicate student marginalization and “create more just and equitable schools” (Theoharis, 2010, p. 332). According to Theoharis (2007), “these principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision” (p. 223). The PSEL Standards (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11) state that administrators “strive for equity of educational support,” affirm all student backgrounds, and provide access to equitable learning activities and services that help all students thrive (Standard 3.c). The PSEL Standards also suggest that administrators combat issues of equity and cultural responsiveness in their leadership practices (NPBEA, 2015, Standard 3.h). Numerous empirical studies in the educational leadership research have explored the administrator’s leadership role for social justice concerns in schools (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Kose, 2009; Theoharis, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010).

Theoharis (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010) authored a series of articles focusing on examining principals who directed social justice in schools they led. Using an auto ethnographic approach,

Theoharis (2007) interviewed seven urban principals regarding the ways in which they direct social justice in their school, the resistance they encounter as social justice leaders, and the resilience they promote to uphold their social justice work. One of his findings was that the participants took intentional steps in professional and personal self-care to help offset the resistance they faced as well as advance their social justice agenda (Theoharis, 2007).

A subsequent study by Theoharis (2007) utilized Fine's (1994) theoretical framework of breaking the silence and his previous seminal investigation (2007) to explore the narratives and efforts of 6 principals who disrupt injustice at their school. Findings suggest that these principals challenged four kinds of injustices in their schools. Examples include: (a) settings that marginalize students (i.e., students of color, poverty, disability); (b) staff members that lack the necessary skills or will to meet the needs of all students; (c) an unwelcoming school environment that hindered school-family-community partnerships; and (d) increasing the educational outcomes of marginalized student populations (Theoharis, 2010). Based on his results, Theoharis (2010) recommended that leaders: uphold the belief that equity can be accomplished in schools, incorporate inclusive practices, utilize staff development and comprehensive planning to foster equity and equality, and develop a learning environment that affirms the worldviews of all cultures.

Kose (2009) voiced that literature regarding the principal's role and function in professional development lacks specific mention on social justice topics. Kose (2009) utilized a qualitative multi-case study design to investigate how three principals for social justice influenced professional development in their schools. Kose (2009) compared his findings to five main roles (i.e., visionary, learning leader, structural leader, cultural leader, and political leader) that were identified after an analysis of the literature. Findings suggest that the principals

engaged in reflexive dialogue with teachers regarding their cultural identity and values, affirmed student diversity, and asked teachers to embed social justice throughout their curriculum and programs (Kose, 2009).

Wang (2015) conducted a qualitative study that explored how 22 school principals understand and perceive social justice in their leadership work. Principals in this study shared specific commonalities, including: equity is “what is good for everybody,” having access and equity in resources, ensuring all students are democratically welcomed in schools, social justice is the work of educators, and upholding a vision for all students’ futures (Wang, 2015, p. 671).

Wasonga (2009) conducted a qualitative study focused on the leadership practices of principals who incorporate social justice and democratic community. Wasonga (2009) identified four themes, including: shared decision-making, advocacy, dispositions and relationships, and social control with purpose. A key finding from Wasonga’s (2009) study was that “principals posited that social justice is enhanced only when decision making is a shared process throughout the school hierarchy and within a given framework” (p. 218). Social justice scholars and national leaders have also called upon the practice of administrators to support and affirm the experiences of LGBT students (Hernandez and Fraynd, 2014; Lugg & Tooms, 2010; NPBEA, 2015; United States Department of Education, 2016).

### **The Administrator’s Responsibility in Supporting LGBT Students**

Policymakers provide clear direction for administrators to act accordingly and adhere to federal and state laws and policies (i.e., Title IX, Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Equal Access Act, Statewide School Non-Discrimination Policies) that promote acceptance and safety for students, including LGBT youth (NPBEA, 2015). Safeguarding and protecting the rights and experiences of LGBT students is a critical responsibility for

administrators (United States Department of Education, 2016). For example, in 2016, a policy letter from the United States Department of Education and the United States Department of Justice delivered a “Dear Colleagues” letter to all educational leaders regarding how to assist and provide a safe and nondiscriminatory climate (i.e., restrooms, locker rooms, privacy and education records) for transgender and gender nonconforming students, as outlined by Title IX (United States Department of Education, 2016).

With respect to concerns of sexual orientation and gender in schools, the PSEL Standards (NPBEA, 2015) make one specific reference to the role of educational leaders. For example, Standard 3.e. “Equity and Cultural Responsiveness” state that effective leaders: “Confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11). Beyond the legal and professional responsibilities, studies about the practice of administrative leadership with LGBT students (Marshall & Hernandez, 2012; O’Malley & Capper, 2015; Tooms & Alston, 2006) are scarce and mainly focused at the administration training level (see Administrator Training on LGBT Topics section).

National survey research conducted by GLSEN and Harris Interactive (2008) with 1,580 K-12 public school principals investigated their perspectives on themes such as school safety issues, the needs of LGBT students and families, anti-bullying strategies and resources, as well as obstacles that prohibit the establishment of LGBT-supportive school climates. GLSEN & Harris Interactive (2008) found that 44% of elementary principals and 33% of secondary principals reported that an LGBT student would feel safe in their school building (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008). Additionally, only 21% of principals noted specific efforts towards addressing the unique needs of LGBT students (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008). This study

also showed that principals cite assistance with facilitating dialogue with school personnel, school boards, and community members on how to take action to support LGBT youth (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008). For example, 69% of principals called for professional development and resources to train school personnel on ways to develop safer and inclusive schools for LGBT students (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008). Although this study voiced the call from principals to create LGBT-inclusive professional development opportunities for schools, there was scant discussion for how other school professionals such as school counselors can support, strengthen, and sustain the leadership practices of principals in addressing the current problem that over 50% of LGBT students do not feel safe at school (Kosciw et al., 2014).

The conceptual literature identifies how administrators can develop an LGBT-inclusive school environment. In efforts to support a queer (fluid sexual and gender identities) leadership approach, Lugg and Tooms (2010) recommend that administrators first stop all forms of bullying and harassment, regardless of student population, and then implement policies and procedures that protect all students from derogatory name-calling. Next, Lugg and Tooms (2010) directed administrators to address their values and attitudes both personally and professionally. For example, these authors emphasized the importance of administrators to broach difficult conversations with school stakeholders (i.e., parents, staff, students) on topics such as gender stereotypes and civil rights (Lugg & Tooms, 2010). According to Lugg and Tooms (2010), “Sometimes, simply wrestling with the question is more important than finding an answer since the process can generate compassion and empathy” (p. 85).

Hernandez and Fraynd (2014) outlined four strategies for principals to increase the protection and support to LGBT students. These authors highlight that principals “should constantly refrain from presumptuously identifying all students as heterosexual” through the

following three recommendations (Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014, p. 118). First, principals can design school-wide activities and celebrations that include positive representation of LGBT students. Second, principals can incorporate a building wide equity audit regarding LGBT concerns such as inclusive resources and policies. Third, principals should increase their knowledge and skills of policies that advocate on behalf of LGBT youth (Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014). However, studies have yet to measure the effectiveness of these recommendations from an administrative lens.

The literature in this section addressed the important role of administrators in developing a safe, diverse, and successful school climate for all students (NPBEA, 2015). NPBEA's (2015) standards acknowledge the role of administrators with respect to equity, social justice, as well as the importance of enhancing the leadership work of others (i.e., teachers); however, several components appear to be missing. For example, this framework provides only one reference to the role and work of administrators with respect to transforming school environments for specific marginalized student populations such as LGBT students. Also, there is a lack of information on how administrators partner and collaborate with other school leaders for inclusive education, such as school counselors. This is especially concerning given that prior research asserts that developing a positive school culture, where each student feels safe, supported, and has access to resources, is imperative for LGBT students (Kosciw et al., 2014) as well as for fostering a shared responsibility among teachers and community members (DuFour & Eaker, 2006, NPBEA, 2015).

Research in this section also identifies that administrators are becoming more aware and report a desire for assistance to help address the needs of LGBT youth (GLSEN & Harris Interactive (2008). Specifically, administrators who participated in the GLSEN and Harris

Interactive (2008) study reported that bullying and discrimination are prevalent concerns for LGBT students in their schools. Alarming, both elementary and secondary school administrator's reported that LGBT youth are less likely to feel safe in their buildings when compared to other marginalized student groups (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008).

These findings are critical for schools and administrators, especially given the federal and state regulations to protect LGBT students (United States Department of Education, 2016). However, there was scant discussion in this literature that specifically addresses how administrators work with school counselors in efforts to reduce bullying of LGBT youth. This gap calls for further exploration, particularly since administrators express assistance on how to educate and train teachers with LGBT issues (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008). In efforts to embrace a shared LGBT perspective between school counselors and administrators, this next section will examine aspects of administrator influence on the role and function of the school counselor.

### **School Counselors and Administrators**

An increasing number of studies address how administrators direct, determine, and impact the role of the school counselor (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Ponec & Brock, 2000). Research also identifies differences in perceived roles between principals and school counselors. Examples include: (a) role confusion (Dahir et al., 2010; Williams & Wehrman, 2010); (b) school counselors assigned non-counseling tasks (Dahir et al., 2010); (c) differences in training between school counselors and principals (Williams & Wehrman, 2010); and (d) limited opportunities for professional trainees to interact during their preparation programs (Williams & Wehrman, 2010). A quantitative study by Armstrong, MacDonald, and Stillo (2010) investigated the differences in perception between school counselors and principals as well as how the participants' training

programs prepared them to work together. An exploratory factor analysis identified three factors that impacted the perceptions between elementary counselors and principals and secondary counselors and principals. These factors include: the quality of school counselor-principal relationships, district leadership, and training satisfaction (Armstrong et al., 2010). This study also called for preparation programs to emphasize school counselor-principal relationships. For example, only 41% of school counselor participants' reported specific learning opportunities regarding school counselor-principal relationships in their training programs (Armstrong et al., 2010; Beck, 2016).

Scholars also claim that the success of school counselors to implement school counseling programs can be influenced by the level of support from their building administrator (Perusse, Goodnow, Donegan, & Jones, 2004; Ponec & Brock, 2000). Specifically, a study with elementary and high school members from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) rated how ASCA's National Standards were incorporated into their school counseling programs (Perusse et al., 2004). Specifically, this study found that more than 80% of high school principals reported non-counseling tasks (i.e., registration, scheduling) as appropriate for school counselors (Perusse et al., 2004). Using a grounded theory methodology, Amatea and Clark (2005) investigated the perceptions about the role of school counselors among 26 school administrators in elementary, middle, and high schools. Consistent with previous research (Perusse et al., 2004), this sample of administrators had four contrasting views regarding the role of school counselors. Examples included: innovative school leader, collaborative case consultant, responsive direct service provider, and partner with the administrator (Amatea & Clark, 2005). Thus, administrators can play an

important role in determining the duties of school counselors. Research has also investigated the ways in which school counselors and administrators collaborate and develop a shared vision for student success.

**School Counselor and Administrator Relationships.** Scholarship calls upon school counselors to address systematic inequities of marginalized populations by working alongside and forming partnerships with key educational stakeholders such with their school principal (ASCA, 2012; Chen-Hayes & Getch, 2015, College Board, 2009a). According to Chen-Hayes and Getch (2015),

Educating principals and other building and district leaders on the changing roles of school counselors and the key function of systemic achievement advocacy is important. Establishing effective relationships with building and district leaders is essential if counselors are to take advocacy-related risks as change agents in school counseling programs. (p. 211)

Similarly, Ratts et al. (2007) recommended that school counselors facilitate a conversation with their building principal on how using an advocacy competency framework may strengthen access and equity for all student populations. ASCA (2012) suggested that school counselors collaborate regularly with administrators to enhance communication, strengthen the identity of the developmental school counseling program, as well as establish a shared vision of equity, access, and positive student outcomes. According to Chen-Hayes and Getch (2015), “the most important requirement for ensuring the success of the school counseling program is to have administrators ‘on board’ and supporting these efforts” (p. 211). Dollarhide, Smith, Lemberger (2007), claim: “To be successful, leadership strategies are based on understanding the relationships between principals and counselors” (p. 2). The following section will examine

studies that have investigated the effectiveness as well as limitations regarding the relationships between school counselors and principals.

**College Board's Survey of Principals and Counselors.** In 2008, a joint effort of the College Board and the National Office for Student Advocacy (NOSCA), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) resulted in an on-line national survey to find out what makes an effective school counselor-principal relationship (College Board, 2009a). A total of 2,386 participants from NOSCA, NASSP, and ASCA responded to the survey, where both school counselors and principals ranked communication, collaboration, respect, and a shared vision as imperative ingredients within a successful school-principal relationship (College Board, 2009a).

Participants also acknowledged and described barriers in their relationship. For example, both school counselors and principals indicated that time to collaborate was an obstacle to forming an effective working relationship (College Board, 2009a). While both school counselors and principals agreed upon which characteristics are essential in their relationships (i.e., open communication, mutual trust, shared vision, commitment to equity), principals frequently cited the presence of these factors more than school counselors did (College Board, 2009a). For example, principals perceived their communications with counselors as high quality as compared to school counselors who stressed the importance on the quantity of communications. The results of this survey guided a second phase of research, where face-to-face interviews were facilitated with school counselor-principal teams (College Board, 2009a).

**College Board's Interviews with Principals and Counselors.** In 2009, NOSCA, NASSP, and ASCA conducted interviews with seven highly effective school-principal teams, where one member had been nationally recognized in their respective association as a Principal

of the Year, School Counselor of the Year, Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP), or partners nominated for the Inspiration Awards (College Board, 2009b). The document entitled, “Finding a Way: Practical Examples of How an Effective Principal-Counselor Relationship Can Lead to Success for All Students” highlighted important factors, ways to overcome adversity, as well as the inspiring stories of effective school counselor-principal teams (College Board, 2009b).

Several participants emphasized the importance of educating each team member regarding their professional role in the school. For example, one participant stated, “A lot of times people don’t really know what counselors do, so the whole RAMP process really brought light to all the different kinds of things they do beyond paperwork and counseling, and how it ties in” (College Board, 2009b, p. 11). Communication was another effective strategy reported by the teams as essential in their school-principal relationship. Similarly, one participant shared, “We don’t have school hours, we do whatever it takes to make sure the kids succeed” (College Board, 2009b, p. 12). “Collaborative decisions take longer,” said one participant, “but they also last a lot longer. Changing the way people work together changes results more than changing structures does” (College Board, 2009b, p. 2). Further, the school counselor-principal teams emphasized a shared level of commitment to equity. “It’s a growth process,” one participant shared. “We all grow; we all have to understand each other’s positions. But we all have the same goal of making sure that students have access for equitable education” (College Board, 2009b, p. 28).

When adversity surfaced in the participant’s relationships, they engaged in collaborative dialogue as well as valued each other’s perspective (College Board, 2009b). For example, when asked about trust and engaging in difficult conversations, one participant shared, “We’ve

developed a bit of intimacy in the relationship. With that, you can have some vulnerabilities. We found out that's okay. I think it's true in any good relationship" (College Board, 2009b, p. 16). Similarly, one member shared, "They have to understand what it is to walk in my shoes, and I have to understand what it is to walk in their shoes" (College Board, 2009b, p. 16).

These success stories offer inspiration and best practices regarding how school counselors and administrators can strengthen their interactions, overcome adversity in their relationship, and renew their professional commitment to increasing student success for low-income and other oppressed populations (College Board, 2009b). However, from an LGBT lens, there was scant discussion within these school counselor-administrator teams regarding how to work collaboratively in meeting the unique needs of LGBT students. The significance of these results may suggest application to the work of school counselors and administrators from an LGBT-relationship focus (Beck, 2016). Additional studies have supported the collaborative roles of school counselors and administrators.

**School Counselor-Administrator Relationship Studies.** Dollarhide and colleagues (2007) used a structured phenomenological methodology to investigate situations that positively influence how principals perceive school counseling programs. Dollarhide et al. (2007) found that principals' observation of school counselors' work with parents and students was an influential experience for principals. Other themes identified in this study included prior exposure to school counseling and positive and collaborative experiences between school counselors and principals (Dollarhide et al., 2007). In 2007, Militello and Janson examined how 39 school counselors and principals perceived their relationship with one another. Through the use of a Q methodology, these researchers identified four unique areas and views of relationship that either enhanced or diminished the shared leadership perspective. These themes included:

traditional duties and roles in assignments, constricted relations, helping and directing leadership, and social purposefully leadership (Militello & Janson, 2007).

Ponec and Brock's (2000) utilized a qualitative design to capture the experiences of relationship among elementary school counselors and principals. Findings include: strategies to define the role of the school counselor, developing trust and communication, the need for on-going support for teachers and school counselors to work with principals (Ponec & Brock, 2000) Consistent with previous findings (College Board, 2009a), mutual trust, communication, and role clarification can be important ingredients within the development of an effective school counselor-principal team. To this date, research has not explored the experiences of school counselors and administrators in their work to support LGBT students. However, conceptual articles have suggested and called up school counselors and principals to adopt a collaborative mindset when working for and with LGBT students.

**School Counselor and Administrator Practices with LGBT Youth.** Literature regarding the work of school counselor-administrator teams with respect to providing a safe and inclusive learning environment for LGBT students is solely conceptual in scope. Goodrich et al. (2013) provided LGBT-welcoming recommendations for school counselor-principal teams. Examples include: developing school policies and procedures that include specific guidelines on how to protect LGBT students, articulating the benefits of hiring school personnel that respect LGBT populations, and developing LGBT-affirmative interview questions (Goodrich et al., 2013). Gonzalez and McNulty (2010) suggested that school counselor's work with principals to provide specific mention to gender identity and expression within school anti-bullying and harassment policies. Goodrich and Luke (2009) recommended that school counselors work with administrators in developing an LGBT professional development workshop for school personnel.

Singh and Burnes (2009) outlined LGBT-related advocacy strategies for school counselors and their work with administrators. These scholars recommend that school counselors incorporate the service delivery function of the ASCA National Model (2012) to communicate the needs of gender-variant youth with administrators. Singh and Burnes (2009) also suggest that school counselors share transgender resources and information with administrators such as the document entitled *Just the Facts about Sexual Orientation and Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators, and School Personnel* (2008).

Lastly, Beck (2016) outlined pedagogical strategies for how school counseling preparation programs can enhance the future work of school counselors and principals with respect to LGBT students. Recommendations included: Educating principals about school counseling programs, exploring personal attitudes and biases, multiple perspective taking, and incorporating data and research. Hence, an important consideration in preparing school counselors and administrators to forge a stronger alliance towards effective LGBT youth advocacy may involve the role of training programs (Beck, 2016; Lloyd-Hazlett & Foster, 2013). Therefore, this final section will examine how preparation programs have addressed and prepared school counselors and administrators to develop safer learning environments for LGBT students.

### **The Role of Preparation Programs**

With LGBT student populations encompassing nearly 5% to 10% of the student body (DePaul et al., 2009) a critical component in providing safe and LGBT-inclusive school climates requires that both school counselors and administrators obtain the adequate knowledge, skills, and awareness during their professional training. As previously noted, professional and educational mandates (ASCA, 2016a, 2016b; Duncan, 2011; United States Department of

Education, 2016) have clearly articulated the responsibility of school counselors and administrators to develop safe and healthy school environments for all student populations, including LGBT youth. Although most school counseling and educational leadership programs incorporate a multicultural course to fulfill these requirements, efforts to meet the unique needs of diverse school populations and the preparation related to LGBT topics and inclusive practices are clearly lacking from both preparation programs. The following sections will highlight the challenges found in the literature.

**School Counselor Training on LGBT Topics.** Counseling literature suggests that counselor education programs are not adequately preparing school counselors to incorporate LGBT-supportive programs and services within their school counseling programs (Farmer, Welfare, & Burge, 2013; Luke, Goodrich, & Scarborough, 2011; Jennings, 2014; Walker & Prince, 2010). For example, Luke et al. (2011) surveyed 123 school counselor educators in how they incorporate LGBT topics into their curriculum. These scholars found a broad range of participant rationales for reasons to include or exclude LGBT topics in their preparation courses, such as: 78.9% to address the unmet issues of K-12 youth, 48% to meet the CACREP standards, 15.4% controversy of subject, 14.6% university policy, 73.2% professional ethics, 4.1% religious affiliation, and 13.8% lack of space in course planning (Luke et al., 2011). Further, Luke and colleagues (2011) reported that the median response for the inclusion of LGBT materials in school counseling curriculum was one entire class meeting or 3 hours.

Similar concerns in school counselor preparation have been articulated in the literature, which include: (a) lack of LGBT knowledge for trainees in counseling theory courses (Buhrke, 1989); (b) limited pedagogy and training recommendations for trainees to incorporate LGBT services into school counseling programs (Goodrich & Luke, 2009); and (c) the lack of

assessment strategies of school counselor training connected to K-12 LGBT youth (Goodrich & Luke, 2009; Luke et al., 2011). Goodrich and Luke (2010) suggest that school counselors receive limited experiential activities with K-12 LGBT students outside of the school counseling training facility. In addition, Farmer and colleagues (2013) found that school counselor skills and competence in working with LGB students are lower than counselors in other settings. Lastly, Beck and colleagues (2014) articulated:

PSCs [school counselors] may experience fear of the unknown based on the lack of knowledge of competence in initially working with LGBTQIQ students. They may fear failure or letting down the student if they misspeak, or if the counseling session goes badly. (p. 364)

Collectively, these identified gaps in knowledge, awareness, and skills related to LGBT-inclusive school counseling preparation are problematic and may directly hinder the ability of school counselors to develop and deliver safe, affirming, and healthy learning spaces for LGBT students (Lloyd-Hazlett & Foster, 2013). Gaps have also been addressed in the educational leadership literature.

**Administrator Training on LGBT Topics.** Recent scholarship identifies the role of administration training programs in preparing administrators for work with LGBT students (Marshall & Hernandez, 2012; O'Malley & Capper, 2015; Tooms & Alston, 2006). Marshall and Hernandez (2012) examined the written narratives of future principals from different cohorts in two courses (i.e., one course was at the beginning of the program and the second course was at the end), where K-12 sexual orientation topics were discussed. Results from this study indicated that future principals responded differently to the LGBT pedagogy and classroom discussions, which included: (a) the amount of exposure and experience that participants had with LGBT

individuals prior to these courses; (b) the clash between religious attitudes with views about sexual orientation; and (c) changes between the first course and the last course (Marshall & Hernandez, 2012). For example, one participant shared their experiences as a current teacher and future principal at the beginning of a course,

I became an Ally when I was at college, but threw my sticker away when I became a teacher. I didn't care what the students thought, but the parents worried me and I didn't want to go somewhere that my principal wouldn't support me (Marshall & Hernandez, 2012, p. 473).

Later in this course, this same participant stated,

Now I think that the discussion should be brought to the forefront and at least the administration should discuss how best to serve all students and make our school a safe environment for all students to learn and be successful (Marshall & Hernandez, 2012, p. 474).

O'Malley and Capper (2015) conducted a quantitative study that investigated how principal preparation programs addressed and integrated LGBTIQ identity. O'Malley and Capper (2015) found that LGBTIQ identity was "often confined to individual faculty rather than integrated throughout the program even in programs that are grounded in social justice" (p. 316). In addition, Tooms and Alston (2006) conducted a quantitative study using the *Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale* with two groups of graduate students enrolled in leadership training programs. Tooms and Alston (2006) found that 61% of the participants held tolerant views toward members of the queer community. In addition, 40% of the participants indicated support of equity for gays and lesbians; whereas, 25% were non supportive (Tooms & Alston, 2006).

Research also identifies that some administrators miscalculate the harassment and discriminatory experiences of K-12 LGBT youth (Marshall & Hernandez, 2012), which may result from the lack of knowledge, skills, and awareness on LGBT topics within the principal preparatory courses. Data from GLSEN & Harris Interactive's (2008) study revealed that administrators cite harassment of students due to their gender expression or identity as 12% occurring 'very often' and only 9% as 'often.' Alarming, 90% of LGBT youth reported experiencing harassment as a result of their gender expression as 'very often' and 62% as 'often' (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008). Taken together, the need to strengthen the preparation of principals and school counselors regarding LGBT youth advocacy exists at both the practitioner and preparation program levels.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

The literature validates that LGBT youth represent a student population that is at-risk for violence-related and other negative mental and health outcomes (Kann et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2012, 2014). The literature (ASCA, 2016a; GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008; Marshall & Hernandez, 2012; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002) and professional standards (ASCA, 2016b; NPBEA, 2015) clearly identify the professional roles and responsibilities of both school counselors and administrators as advocates and leaders for incorporating LGBT-related supports and services. Studies also suggest that when school counselors and administrators merge their leadership skills, students benefit from robust school climates as well as strengthen the ability to address barriers that impact student success (College Board, 2009b). While conceptual articles have identified the need for school counselor-administrator collaboration with respect to LGBT advocacy (Beck, 2016; Goodrich et al., 2013; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010, Singh & Burnes,

2009), empirical studies have not yet explored the relationships between school counselors and administrators in schools that support and address LGBT student needs.

One way to address this gap is to explore the relationship experiences of school counselors and administrators who partner and develop a safe and inclusive school environment for LGBT students. Therefore, this study was guided by the following research questions: a) What are the lived experiences of school counselors and administrators who make concerted efforts to improve the educational environment for LGBT students?; and b) How do school counselors and administrators make meaning with their relationships in their work with LGBT students? Such research may provide best practices for how current school counselor-principal teams and training programs can develop a shared vision of student success for LGBT students.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methods and procedures in which this study was conducted. Specifically, the following sections will discuss this study's research design, the role of the researcher, research paradigm and tradition, participant selection, data collection and analysis procedures, trustworthiness, and limitations.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and describe the relationship experiences of school counselor-administrator teams with regard to developing a safe and inclusive school environment for LGBT students. This study was guided by the following research questions:

- a) What are the lived experiences of school counselors and administrators who make concerted efforts to improve the educational environment for LGBT students?
- b) How do school counselors and administrators make meaning with their relationships in their work with LGBT students?

Since the goal of this study was for participant teams to ascribe meaning to their relationship experiences, a qualitative research design was selected as a methodological choice for this study. This next section will provide a rationale for selecting this methodology.

#### **Appropriateness of Research Design**

Qualitative research is a method for understanding and exploring a phenomenon of interest through an inductive process of human meaning making (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). According to Merriam (2009), "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their

worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). The literature outlines components of qualitative research, including broad and open-ended emerging questions, data collected in the participant’s environment and culture, and data analysis and reporting the results are interpretive in nature (Creswell, 2014; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). According to Rossman and Rallis (2012) qualitative researchers engage in self-awareness and the phenomenon being studied (i.e., reflexivity). They conceptualize the social world holistically, incorporate complex reasoning, as well as utilize conceptual theory that guides decision-making throughout the research process (i.e., systematic inquiry).

### **Benefits of Qualitative Methodology**

The relationship experiences between school counselors and administrators who partner on initiatives for LGBT students has yet to be an investigated line of research. Therefore, by selecting a qualitative design, the researcher aimed to discover, understand, and examine this phenomenon through the use of in-depth interview questions. The researcher also planned to identify themes that result in a rich description regarding how school counselor-principal teams’ interpret and attach meaning to their shared partnerships. This next section will highlight the researcher’s role in this study and how his perspectives impacted the paradigms selected in this study.

**Role of the Researcher.** An important component of qualitative research involves the role of the researcher. According to Creswell (2014), a research study incorporates the philosophical worldviews of the researcher, research approaches, and specific methodology. First, when organizing a research study, it is important for the investigator to acknowledge and describe their beliefs and philosophical worldviews that they bring to the research topic and how these attitudes shape the selection of a research design (Creswell, 2014; Hays & Wood, 2011).

According to Hays and Wood (2011), these worldviews “serve as a foundational guide or blueprint that highlights the counseling researcher’s assumptions, values, and activities related to the scientific pursuit for a particular research topic” (p. 288).

Thus, the researcher must be willing to explore their worldviews, attitudes, biases, and experiences through a statement about the investigator’s role as a human instrument (see Appendix A). Having the personal experience as a gay man who was raised in a predominantly heterosexual rural area and school system with scant LGBT-related supports and services, I am particularly interested and passionate to help develop school environments where LGBT students can be more of themselves. In my former role as school counselor, my advocacy efforts pushed back against school district policies that perpetuated a school culture of discrimination towards the LGBT study body (Beck et al., 2014). As a result, my interactions with allies while working to create change in my former school district have prompted me to educate others, facilitate change at the systemic level, and conduct research on ways to reduce the discrimination towards the LGBT student population.

In addition, my personal experiences of prejudice based on my sexual orientation have also strengthened my voice to create awareness and knowledge within the profession on developing collaborative strategies to address the unique needs of LGBT populations. My personal and professional attitudes and assumptions imposed from holding environments from early childhood to my present work as a doctoral candidate, have strengthened my voice, commitment, and have shaped my understanding of the world that I live. Given my educational background and experiences, I believe that school personnel such as principals and school counselors must be prepared regarding how to advocate in school systems that are unwilling to incorporate LGBT-related supports. Therefore, I am eager to develop a program of research that

aims to establish best practices for practitioners as well as preparation programs regarding how to improve the educational experiences for LGBT students.

As the researcher in this study, it is important that I take specific steps to acknowledge and address my perspectives on the phenomenon being studied. Strategies (see trustworthiness section) such as bracketing, reflexivity, peer debriefing, and consultation with research professionals will be utilized “to understand the phenomenon through the eyes of those who have direct, immediate experience with it” (Hays & Wood, 2011, p. 291).

### **Rationale for Phenomenological Approach**

A phenomenological research approach was selected for this study. The main intention of phenomenology is to provide a rich description of meaning to participant experiences of a phenomenon (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hunt, 2011). Phenomenological investigators explore what participants experience and how they make meaning of the world (Hays & Wood, 2011; Patton, 2002; Wertz, 2005). Through prolonged and direct contact with the participant and their environment, researchers search for shared experiences across participant stories and experiences of the phenomenon (Hays & Wood, 2011; Patton, 2002; Wertz, 2005).

Phenomenological methodology requires the researcher to be engaged with participants, who have direct experience with the phenomenon, for a lengthened period of time (Hays & Wood, 2011). This study allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth investigation of the meaning to the phenomenon of relationship experienced among school counselor-administrator teams who develop a safe and inclusive school environment for LGBT students. Referred to as the research paradigm, this next section will discuss how the previously articulated worldviews and perspectives on this phenomenon have guided the researcher to select the interpretivist worldview.

## **Research Paradigm**

An interpretivist paradigm was utilized in this study. According to Rossman and Rollis (2012), interpretivists strive to “understand the social world as it is (the status quo) from the perspective of individual experience” (p. 43). Interpretive research aims to explore and interpret various individuals’ subjective experiences and meanings regarding the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). Thus, interpretivism views individuals as “creators of their worlds” (Rossman & Rollis, 2012, p. 43-44) through understanding them in-depth (i.e., interviews, observations) within the environment in which they occur (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998). As compared to starting with a theory (i.e., positivism), interpretivists would often use an inductive approach to help shape their interpretation of themes and patterns of meaning from individuals (Creswell, 2014). Researchers also acknowledge their personal and cultural worldviews and how these experiences may or may not impact their interpretations (Creswell, 2014).

## **Target Participants**

The methods used to select participants for this study were modeled after College Board’s (2009b) study with seven exemplary school counselor-principal teams. To organize these teams, College Board (2009b) first identified school counselors and principals who received recognition for demonstrating exemplary contribution in their respective professional organizations. Specifically, eligible participants were invited from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (i.e., School Counselor of the Year, Recognized ASCA Model Program), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) (i.e., Principal of the Year), and College Board (i.e., Inspiration Award). Next, each national honoree was paired with their respective school counselor and/or principal they worked with in their school building.

Through joint interviews, these exemplary school counselor-principal duos highlighted their success stories as well as obstacles when partnering to strengthen the educational outcomes for their students (College Board, 2009b). Applying College Board's (2009b) participant selection procedures to this study is an important strategy to model best LGBT-inclusive practices based on the stories of exemplary (awarded/recognized) school counselors and administrators and the relationship experiences with their school counselor or administrator counterparts.

By paralleling the best practice protocol established by the College Board (2009b), the goal was to advance this study by exploring the relationship experiences of exemplary school counselors and administrators with their school counselor or administrator counterparts regarding their work with LGBT students. Eligible participants included school counselors and administrators who received recognition for making concerted efforts for and with LGBT students in their respective school building. Additional eligible participants included school counselors and administrators who work with these exemplary professionals in their school building. This was operationally defined as: (a) current school counselors and administrators awarded/recognized at the national or state level for their commitment to ensuring a safe and inclusive school environment for LGBT students; and (b) current school counselors and administrators identified as the school counselor or administrator counterpart to the award/recognized professional.

### **Sampling Procedures**

Purposive participant sampling (Hunt, 2011) was used to obtain a network of honored participants from national and state LGBT education organizations. Before Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the researcher searched for these individuals in the public domain (i.e.,

websites, Facebook, etc.) on various state and national LGBT organizations. This sampling strategy identified a total of five participants.

After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the researcher previewed multiple sources (i.e., press releases, school websites, school handbooks, etc.) and determined that one participant relocated to a different school building since receiving their award and therefore did not meet the aforementioned participant selection criteria. This resulted in four exemplary participants that met all pre-determined screening requirements. The number of exemplary school counselors and administrators (awarded/recognized) at the national level was two and four at the state level, respectively. Of the possible four exemplary participants, two were school counselors and two were administrators. Of the two school counselors, one was recognized at the state level and one was recognized at both the state and national level. Of the two administrators, one was recognized at the national level and one was recognized at the state level.

The researcher selected these exemplary school counselors and administrators because they demonstrated commitment to ensure that LGBT youth attend school in a healthy, positive, and inclusive school environment. In addition, these professionals met the benchmarks and criteria that several LGBT organizations outlined in their awards nomination process. Examples of these award programs include: Educator of the Year, Ally Award, and Educator of the Year Semifinalists and Honor Roll. Characteristics found in the nomination criteria include: classroom lessons and professional development that embraces diversity and inclusiveness, supporting LGBT youth identity development, and advocating for school policies and anti-bullying procedures that support LGBT students.

Next, the researcher sent invitations to participate via email to these four exemplary participants (See Appendix B). This document included the following: the purpose of the study,

participation criteria, confidentiality, the role of audio recordings, participant rights, the reporting of the data, the role of the researcher, as well as detailed instructions for participants to complete a demographic survey (see Appendix C) and give consent (See Appendix D) to participate. A total of four exemplary participants responded to the email request, completed the demographic survey, and provided consent to participate. Next, the researcher contacted each exemplary school counselor and/or administrator and engaged in an initial interview via phone. Specifically, the researcher asked each exemplary participant to answer brief questions regarding their work on behalf of LGBT students and inclusive schools (see Appendix D). Data collection procedures are explained more in detail in the following section (see Data Collection).

To organize the school counselor-administrator teams, the exemplary participants were then asked to share an email invitation to participate with their school counselor/administrator counterpart on behalf of the researcher. Two unanticipated requests from the exemplary participants occurred during this phase of the study. First, the exemplary participant in Team 1 requested that her entire school counseling department (2 counselors) join and participate in the study. Second, the exemplary participant in Team 4 requested that their school counseling intern from a neighboring university join with the administrator counterpart and participate in the study. The researcher honored these requests. As a result, a total of six school counselor/administrator counterparts' provided consent and agreed to participate in the study. Of the six school counselor/administrator counterparts, two were administrators, three were school counselors, and one was a school counselor-in-training. Once combined, each administrator-counselor team was contacted through email to schedule the joint interviews.

**School Counselor-Administrator Teams.** Four school counselor-administrator teams, consisting of ten total individuals participated in the study. Of the four teams, five participants

were schools counselors, four were administrators, and one was a school counselor-in-training. Three teams were at high schools (Team 1, 2, and 4) and one was at a middle school level (Team 3). Both school counselors and administrators (not including the school counselor-in-training) had been working together as teams between two and 22 years.

Members within each team also were asked about their school classification (i.e., urban, suburban, rural); however, a few members differed in their responses (see Table 1.0 below). Overall, four respondents reported that they came from urban schools, five respondents came from suburban schools, and one respondent from a small town/rural school. Table 1.0 (below) also indicates district classification for each school team based upon two metrics (urban and rural) as specified by the National Center for Education Statistics. The urban classification is separated into the following categories and subcategories, including: city (i.e., large, midsize, and small), suburb (i.e., large, midsize, and small), and town (i.e., fringe, distant, and remote). The rural classification is separated into fringe, distant, and remote. As for location, three participant teams were located in the Midwest and one was located in the East Coast region.

With respect to time in current position (not including the school counselor-in-training), one participant had 4-6 years of experience, two participants had 7-10 years of experience, and six participants had 15 plus years of experience. All ten participants self-identified as White or European American. Of the 10 participants, one school counselor and administrator identified as gay and one administrator identified as transsexual. For a comprehensive description of the team and school demographics, please refer to Table 1.0 found below. For a complete description of each individual participant within each team, please refer to Table 2.0 found below. Additional team, individual participant, and school demographic information can also be found in Chapter 4.

Table 1: Team and School Demographics

| <b>Team Information</b> | <b>Type of School &amp; Enrollment</b>    | <b>School Location</b>  | <b>Geographic Location</b> | <b>Team Experience</b> |
|-------------------------|---|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Team 1                  | High school, public, 1200 students        | <b>Self-designation:</b> Suburban (2), Urban (1)<br><b>District-designation:</b> Urban-suburb (large)           | East Coast                 | 13 years               |
| Team 2                  | High school, public charter, 355 students | <b>Self-designation:</b> Urban (2)<br><b>District-designation:</b> Urban-city (large)                           | Midwest                    | 2 years                |
| Team 3                  | Middle school, public, 662 students       | <b>Self-designation:</b> Small town/rural (1) Suburban (1)<br><b>District-designation:</b> Urban-suburb (large) | Midwest                    | 7 years                |
| Team 4                  | High School public, 1131 students         | <b>Self-designation:</b> Suburban (2), Urban (1)<br><b>District-designation:</b> Urban-city (small)             | Midwest                    | 22 years               |

Table 2: Individual Participant Demographics

| <b>Participant</b>                   | <b>Role</b>                           | <b>Race</b>                | <b>Gender Identity</b> | <b>Time in Current Position</b> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Genna</b><br>(Team 1)             | Principal                             | White or European American | Female transsexual     | 15 plus                         |
| <b>G</b><br>(Team 1)                 | School Counselor/Special Education    | White or European American | Female                 | 15 plus                         |
| <b>N</b><br>(Team 1)                 | School Counselor                      | White or European American | Female                 | 15 plus                         |
| <b>Tony</b><br>(Team 2)              | Principal                             | White or European American | Male                   | 7-10 years                      |
| <b>Jen</b><br>(Team 2)               | School Counselor                      | White or European American | Female                 | 4-6 years                       |
| <b>Beatrice</b><br>(Team 3)          | Principal                             | White or European American | Female                 | 15 plus                         |
| <b>Lady Rainbow (LR)</b><br>(Team 3) | School Counselor                      | White or European American | Female                 | 7-10 years                      |
| <b>Big Cat (BC)</b><br>(Team 4)      | Associate Principal/Athletic Director | White or European American | Male                   | 15 plus                         |
| <b>SMJ</b><br>(Team 4)               | School Counselor                      | White or European American | Female                 | 15 plus                         |
| <b>DRM</b><br>(Team 4)               | School Counselor Intern               | White or European American | Female                 | 1-3 years                       |

## **Data Collection and Procedures**

Qualitative research allows for flexibility so the nature of participant experiences and meaning can emerge (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection strategy along with follow-up interviews in order to triangulate the data (Merriam, 2009). In addition, the researcher collected and previewed school artifacts (i.e., press releases, safe space icons, handbooks), which added additional depth to the study.

After collecting the demographic surveys and obtaining consent, as described above, data collection was commenced in the form of interviews. The semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix F) was created based upon the purpose of this study, guiding research questions, and the review of literature (Hunt, 2011). These open-ended questions allowed for focus, while acknowledging the importance of flexibility to capture the lived relationship experiences of the school counselor-administrator teams. If needed, the researcher incorporated probing questions (see Appendix F) to clarify and gain a richer description of the participants' experiences.

## **Expert Reviewers**

While developing the semi-structured interview questions, the researcher contacted five experts in the field of school counseling and educational leadership from around the country (see Appendix G) with experience on LGBT topics, at both the practitioner and preparation program level. The purpose was to obtain feedback to the interview questions as well as for provide additional perspectives from experts that would benefit this study. The researcher adapted the interview protocol based on the feedback from the expert panel of reviewers and dissertation committee members.

The interviews were completed over three sessions (Hunt, 2011) and within a 3 month time frame. A total of 18 interviews were completed in this study. Each interview lasted

approximately 20-65 minutes in length and was facilitated via phone and/or in-person based on the researcher's proximity to the participants. Specifically, six interviews were conducted in person and twelve were conducted via telephone. As noted earlier, the first interview was conducted with each exemplary participant. The second interview was facilitated with the school counselor-administrator team. The third interview was facilitated separately with each administrator and school counselor. For triangulation purposes, the third interview followed-up to emerging themes from the second interview. This allowed the researcher to clarify or deepen responses to the second interview questions as well as provide an opportunity for participants to share and highlight their work for LGBT students in their current role. After each interview, participants were provided with an opportunity to debrief, provide feedback, and ask further questions about the study.

Participants were informed that their interview was audio-recorded. In addition, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. After the data from the interviews was collected, the researcher engaged in the following steps to ensure confidentiality and data management procedures. First, the recordings, electronic copies of transcriptions, and other documentation were stored on a password-protected file on the researcher's password-protected laptop. In addition, in accordance with IRB stipulations, the audio files will be destroyed one year after the study has been completed. Similarly, the electronic transcripts will be destroyed five years after the study has been completed.

Throughout the study, the researcher provided his contact information (i.e., email, phone number) to allow participants ample time to ask questions throughout the study. To comply with ethical research protocol, the researcher followed several steps. First, this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB; See Appendix E). Second, the researcher provided an

informed consent document within the demographic survey (see Appendix C and D) that articulated the purpose and rationale of the study. Third, the researcher asked participants to select a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality as well as explained the role of recordings, confidentiality, and data collection.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research can be described as "making sense out of the data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 175) and the literature offers several examples and terms to describe the phenomenological data analysis. For example, Hays and Wood (2011) outline Moustakas' four terms of epoche, horizontalization, invariant meaning, and structural description. Patton (2002) recommends that researchers utilize a sequence of open, axial, and selective coding. Other examples in the literature include: developing themes or categories (Rossman & Rallis, 2012), grouping data categorically and chronologically (Creswell, 2014), and reducing (Merriam, 2009), in efforts to draw perspectives and make meaning.

In this study, phenomenological reduction began after this researcher finished each interview. Specifically, eleven interviews were transcribed verbatim by this researcher and seven were transcribed by a third-party professional. Using the original audio-recorded sessions, the third-party transcripts were examined for any errors twice. After each interview was transcribed, participants received an invitation via a confidential link on dropbox.com with a copy of their interview transcript (i.e. member checking). Participants had the opportunity to review, edit, and add to their interview responses. A total of six participants responded to the member checks. In particular, two participants provided corrections/additions and four participants responded that the transcripts were an accurate reflection of their experiences.

The researcher utilized an inductive approach to understand the various interpretations that participants voiced to their experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Rossman & Rollis, 2012). This included: the assignment of codes, themes or patterns (i.e., open coding) to segments of data, interpreting the data from the lens of the participant, and asking participants to verify the themes (i.e., member checking), identifying common categories across the data, and providing a written narrative of the findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Hays & Wood, 2011; Patton, 2002). These specific steps will be outlined in the following section.

First, the researcher openly acknowledged and bracketed his worldviews and experiences (i.e., epoche; Moustakas, 1994) through the use of a reflexive journal and discussions with other researchers (see section on trustworthiness and peer debriefing), as outlined in the researcher statement (see Appendix A). The first phase of coding began during the transcription process, where the researcher took initial notes and began to identify patterns. Next, each transcript was read and initially coded through a process called open coding (Merriam, 2009). Open coding enabled the researcher to identify important statements from the data that explored the phenomenon of interest (Moustakas, 1994). During the third phase of phenomenological reduction, the researcher reviewed and then identified all nonrepetitive statements (i.e., invariant meaning units) through a process called horizontalization (Hays & Wood, 2011). Lastly, the researcher related and then categorized the invariant meaning units into larger themes and subthemes (Hays & Wood, 2011). This coding/reduction phase continued until there was saturation of data on this topic. According to Merriam, saturation is "the point which you realize no new information, insights, or understandings are forthcoming" (p. 183). Once data analysis was completed with all four teams, this researcher was able to identify consistent patterns and themes and felt confident that sampling more data would not lead to new dimensions related to

the research questions. At this point, the researcher consulted with his dissertation chair and peer debriefers to discuss saturation and the acceptable number of participant teams in this study.

Each interview followed the data analysis procedures and format as outlined above. A within-case data analysis was utilized to capture the experiences of each school counselor-principal team. From these stories, the researcher employed a cross-case data analysis approach to gather emerging and sub theme categories that represented the experiences of the school counselor-administrator teams. In order to ensure that the results were authentic and trustworthy, the researcher took several steps to enhance the reliability and validity of this study (Merriam, 2009).

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is a process in qualitative research that ensures that “some rigor in carrying out the study” was established (Merriam, 2009, p. 209). Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined four criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research, which includes: credibility-transferability, dependability, and conformability. In efforts to ensure trustworthiness in this study, the researcher will outline these strategies in the following section.

To ensure there is a credible match among the participants’ and the researchers’ view, Rossman and Rallis (2012) highlighted several techniques to strengthen the credibility and rigorousness of a qualitative study such as triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking. First, this study utilized three rounds of interviews (Hunt, 2011). Consequently, the researcher compared the results that were taken at different times and settings to ensure credibility. Second, the researcher engaged in member checking, where the transcripts of the interviews were sent to all of the participants (Hunt, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Participants were invited to edit and elaborate on the information. Third, the researcher spent a lot of time

with each of the participants through the interviews (2-3 months) and answered questions about the study to ensure that he had “more than a snapshot view of the phenomenon” (Rossmann & Rallis, 2012).

To establish dependability in this study, the researcher utilized an audit trail that organized and traced all of the steps from the beginning to the end of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, the audit trail contained: participant contact information and decisions made, interview records, researcher notes, demographic information, transcription and member checking information, findings (i.e., codes, themes, and categories), IRB information, field notes, and journaling.

To demonstrate that information in this study was provided in a clear and in an objective manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researcher utilized reflexive journaling in this study. The researcher made weekly comments about his hunches and personal experiences, which allowed for the safeguarding and understanding of the attitudes and worldviews throughout the research process. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the use of reflexive journaling is "a kind of diary in which the investigator on a daily basis, or as needed, records a variety of information about self and method" (p. 327). The researcher also utilized bracketing during data analysis. Specifically, he noted (red coded text) any reactions, experiences, or emotions in the margins of the transcript. In addition, the researcher recorded his field notes and research decisions throughout this study within his reflexive journal (Hunt, 2011; Rossmann & Rallis, 2012).

Throughout the study, the researcher frequently consulted and utilized frequent debriefing sessions with several colleagues and faculty members. First, the researcher consulted with his dissertation advisor, which provided an opportunity for the researcher to explore emerging themes as well as examine any potential biases or experiences. Second, the researcher

worked closely with two peer debriefers (Rossmann & Rallis, 2012) to review the themes and categories as well as provide feedback to his accuracy, credibility, and personal values. Specifically, one peer debriefer had expertise in school counseling and LGBT topics; whereas, the other peer debriefer was a faculty member who specialized in school counselor education. An additional faculty member with expertise in qualitative research methods (particularly phenomenology) as well as content (LGBT topics) was also asked to conduct an external audit of the study documents. The auditor reviewed the audit trail, transcripts, data analysis, notes/journal, as well as steps taken for trustworthiness for accuracy. This additional strategy allowed the researcher to check or refine his data analysis methods as well as helped the researcher explore any personal attitudes or experiences related to this study in general.

### **Limitations**

All research studies have limitations that need to be addressed. As commonly found in qualitative research, this study utilized a small sample size of school counselor-administrator teams. Although the stringent enrollment criteria led to four exemplary teams that met all pre-determined screening requirements, this may have limited the number of teams available to the researcher. Future studies could expand these screening requirements to include school counselors and administrators whom were not recognized/awarded for their work for LGBT students. An additional limitation to this study addresses the racial composition of the school counselor-administrator teams. All participants identified as White or European American; therefore, future studies should work towards a more diverse sample. Although generalizability is not typically applicable to qualitative research, expanding this study to include teams with diverse characteristics and practices would be an important step in determining whether these findings are applicable to other counselor-administrator teams. In addition, elementary team

participants were not utilized in this study and this would be an area for further inquiry. Lastly, given the researchers personal and professional experiences as an advocate for LGBT students, the role of researcher bias is another limitation to this study. However, the author engaged in several strategies such as journaling, bracketing, and peer debriefing to allow for his personal worldviews and biases to be acknowledged throughout the research study.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This study was conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of school counselor-administrator teams in their work with LGBT students. Four school counselor-administrator teams, consisting of ten total individuals (5 schools counselors, 4 administrators, and 1 school counselor-in-training) agreed to participate. Data were collected through 3 rounds of semi-structured interviews with each team. A total of 18 interviews were conducted and analyzed from a within-case and cross-case/between approach. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with an overview of each team's individual experience (within-case) and five emerging themes and 13 subthemes (cross-case), which best represent the lived experiences across the four teams. The cross-case themes include: Learning firsthand, leading by example, intentional partnering, moving beyond turf wars, and pushing the system.

#### **Within-Case Analysis**

**Snapshot: Team 1.** Team 1's school was a grade 11-12 Career and Technical Center located in the East Coast Region. The school provides specialized technical, academic, college, and career readiness education to approximately 1,200 students through partnerships with eight home school districts. Student information (i.e., enrollment by ethnicity, economically disadvantaged, gender, etc.) for this school was unable to be located. However, a review of public documents via the school website revealed specific non-discrimination and anti-bullying protections for LGBT students including gender identity and sexual orientation (i.e., heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, or asexuality).

Team 1 consisted of one exemplary administrator (Genna, high school principal, 21 years of experience) and two school counselors (G, 13 years of experience and N, 27 years of

experience) who all self-identified as White or European American. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted via telephone with Team 1 participants. When asked about their school setting (i.e., urban, suburban, and small town/rural), Team 1 participants responded differently. Two participants (G and N) reported that their school was located in a suburban setting and one participant (Genna) reported a location of an urban setting.

As the building principal, Genna's work and advocacy for LGBT students was recognized at state and local levels from both school administrator associations as well as LGBT education organizations. Genna also became the first openly identified transgender principal at her school, when she transitioned to a different name and gender identity during her tenure. With respect to gender identity, Genna self-identified as a female transsexual on the demographic survey; however, identified as transgender and female throughout the interviews. Both G and N self-identified as female. Team 1 had 13 years of experience working together as a team and all three participants had 15 plus years of time in their respective professional positions. In particular, Genna had 21 years of administrative experience and was phasing into retirement towards the conclusion of the interviews.

***Meaning-Making in Relationship.*** Members in Team 1 experienced and prescribed meaning to their relationship in various ways. Creating mutual respect, trust, and establishing friendships beyond their professional roles was salient. Meaning was derived from developing a safe place to share personal and life experiences, where "if anyone's door becomes closed, we talk it out" (Session 2, Line 77). In particular, Genna's transition from male to female on the job had a pronounced effect for Team 1 members, staff and students, as well as their school counseling-administrator relationship. According to G (Session 3, Line 54-56), "When someone shares something with you that is personal that they haven't been comfortable sharing with

someone else (...) it is an honor. So, um I would say that it strengthened our relationship.”

Genna stated:

Many of them [school counselors and staff] went out and bought books and read about me. And read more about transgender people (...) Not because I told them to...but because they wanted to be informed and that speaks volumes to the kind of people we have here (Session 1, Line 648-650).

Empowering one another and sharing personal and professional stories was reciprocated between all members in Team 1. “She’s done the same for me,” G said (Session 3, Line 63).

Participants also found meaning through open communication and collaborating to support their diverse student population, including LGBT youth. For instance, Genna’s office was coined as the “hub of the building,” where members would gather and share information about student needs as well as the aforementioned personal and life experiences (Session 2, Line 33). Team 1 functioned as a “well-oiled machine and by supporting students” (Session 3, Line 120). Developing a shared vision of what an inclusive and safe school environment looked like was integral to Team 1. Members shared that work for LGBT youth was long over due and requires an empathic and caring mindset to avoid “sweeping it under the rug” (Session 2, Line 836). As such, LGBT youth needs were individualized and understood from a social, cultural, and educational perspective. Genna said, “It’s smart enough to know that not everybody fits into the same peg, the same hole (Session 2, Line 525) (...) We are like the beacon for LGBT youth” (Session 2, Line 199).

Members also prescribed meaning to their professional roles within the relationship. As the principal, Genna empowered her school counseling team to initiate and engage in leadership roles. Meaning was experienced when Genna enlisted the strengths and expertise of both school

counselors to support the unique needs of transgender students. For example, G and N would counsel youth; whereas Genna would have her door open for students to share and learn firsthand from her personal experiences. According to Genna (Session 2, Line 46)”

(...) I’m not expert in everything nor do I pretend to be. So, I reach out, you know, when I know I need assistance in a particular area. And I think that is what we have been doing for years.

***Collaborative LGBT Work.*** Having a solid working relationship and shared vision towards an inclusive school climate enhanced Team 1’s success and collaboration for LGBT youth. Team 1 believed that Genna’s personal story as well as their collective work inspired other staff and youth to become more involved. According to G:

So, we (...) have a little team that is very supportive, I feel. And then it’s just a ripple effect that went down to the staff starting the LGBTQ Alliance in our building to support kids. Kids became very proactive at that point (Session 2, Line 165).

Participants also reflected upon their successes and partnership with the local LGBTQ center as well as teachers that incorporate LGBT representation into curriculum. Team 1 also commented upon the value they saw in bringing in guest speakers from the local LGBTQ center to assist with professional development in the school building. Additionally, Team 1 engaged in collaborative school-wide inclusive initiatives such as art shows and GLSEN sponsored activities (i.e., Day of Silence, Ally pledges, and No-Name Calling Week).

***Professional Training.*** Team 1 members felt that their master’s training programs lacked specific mention to LGBT topics. Over time; however, participants were able to increase their knowledge, skills, and awareness. Genna’s personal story was meaningful for G and N and bolstered education and awareness with respect to LGBT topics. Genna felt that her own

personal experiences, reading literature, and partnering with local LGBT organizations supported her professional growth. Members also reflected upon the significance and need for other professionals to connect with and learn from the LGBT community. Genna shared (Session 2, Line 601), “I think it’s exposure to people who know people who are gay, or lesbian, or trans. That personal connection (...) to ask questions, feel more comfortable, and presenting that information onto other people.” N recognized the need for work in supporting and working with parents and families of LGBT youth. She advocated for school counseling training programs and state organizations to make concerted efforts in these areas.

Team 1 also felt that diversity, humanism, role modeling, and relationship building should be “pervasive throughout the culture of your school” (Session 2, Line 787). As such, how to support, get along, and care for each other was integral within Team 1 and also recommended for other school counselor-administrator teams, staff, and faculty. Lastly, Team 1 remained hopeful and believed that changes were being made to how administrator and school counselor trainees’ were prepared for work with LGBT youth. According to N (Session 3, Line 298), “(...) I’m (...) hoping the new counselors who are leaving the college, they have that sensitivity.” G reported a “school grassroots culture” shift at the practitioner level (Session 3, Line 149). She went on to state: “I do see a little bit of a school grassroots cultural shift towards really, maybe just more than talking the talk. But really, um, trying to respect human beings” (Session 3, Line 149-151).

**Snapshot: Team 2.** Team 2’s school was an urban grades 9-12 public charter school located in the Midwest region. This school provides a college preparatory and arts-incorporated education to approximately 350 students from more than 20 different school districts. In addition, the school has a mission and vision based on safety, inclusion, high academic

achievement, dedication to the arts, and rigorous college preparedness. A review of the student handbook revealed several examples and specific expectations for student conduct that affirms and respects the LGBT community. In particular, the student code of conduct included specific language and protections for students based on differences such as gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation. As far as student demographics, approximately 92 percent of the students graduate each year.

With respect to student diversity, this school student body is socioeconomically diverse with approximately 50 percent of minority students (i.e., American Indian/Alaskan, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, two or more races). Nearly 38 percent of the students self-identify as LGB and 15 percent of the students self-identify as transgender and/or gender fluid. Approximately 42% of students are free lunch eligible, whereas 8% are reduced lunch eligible. Welcoming and supporting all student groups regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, race or religion serves as a central tenant in the school's school climate. In addition, this school has been recognized at the state level for high achievement as well as the federal level for inclusive school climate practices. This school intentionally celebrates the LGBT community through curriculum, novels with LGBT characters, discussions about marriage equality, and a drag show.

Team 2 consisted of one exemplary administrator (Tony, principal) and one school counselor (Jen) who both self-identified as White or European American. Four semi-structured interviews via telephone were conducted with Team 2 participants. Tony received recognition from a national LGBT organization for his significant commitment to LGBT students as well as for his trailblazing efforts to develop a safe and inclusive school climate. Tony self-identified as a gay male; whereas Jen self-identified as female. Tony and Jen had two years of experience

working together at this school. Jen had 4-6 years of experience as a school counselor and Tony had 7-10 years of experience as a principal.

***Meaning-Making in Relationship.*** Trust between Tony and Jen was established very early. Tony recalled how “we [Tony and Jen] really did click very immediately,” and was an intentional process that started during the hiring process (Session 3 Line 57). When asked what led them to work together for LGBT youth, Tony shared that his previous school counselor was less inclined to engage in LGBT efforts; whereas with Jen he saw “(...) an opportunity to do these things in a more productive way” (Session 2, Line 93). Trust and support was reciprocated between both team members. Jen stated, “It’s a friendship-colleague relationship where I really trust Tony and his opinion and can confide in him” (Session 2, Line 7-8). With respect to decision-making on school initiatives, Tony expressed:

When they [school counselors] have ideas on how they want to make (...) things happen or have things that they want to implement (...) trust them to be the expert in that and let them develop the programs that they want to develop (Session 2, Line 54-56).

Tony later reflected: “(...) any (...) principal that thinks that they are an expert in every aspect is a fool. You know, that’s a bad way to approach leadership” (Session 3, Line 138). In essence, intentional role induction and “using each others’ strengths in the situation” fostered collegiately, collaboration, and dialogue about LGBT initiatives in their relationship and throughout the building (Session 2, Line 392). Although most of their work was done jointly, Jen felt open to establish boundaries and clarify her role when working with Tony regarding student discipline issues. She stated, “I’m happy to have a frank conversation, but the discipline on whatever it may be, comes from you [Tony]” (Session 3, Line 194).

Meaning was also experienced within Team 2 from having a safe and supportive place to share personally and professionally. Jen shared that the administration and counseling teams met weekly. She emphasized that “Something that we do in that meeting that I feel like relates to how Tony and I work together and how he runs our staff meeting is that we take a few minutes to check-in” (Session 3, Line 251-253). Jen shared that “talking about things that aren’t work related” (Session 3, Line 133) helped build rapport.

For Jen, having an openly gay administrator (Tony) was meaningful and impactful. According to Jen, “ I mean truthfully it kind of makes me respect him more. I don’t think I realize (...) how infrequent it happens as far as having an out administrator (Session 3, Line 113-115). Jen later expressed that having Tony as an authentic role model “who is a minority and is in the position that he is in” can be invaluable for LGBT students (Session 3, Line 100). Tony shared that his obligation to the LGBT student population drew from his high school days. He later reflected

(...) I have an experience from high school that was not positive. And I know what that can be like for teenagers when I think that. I make it part of my mission to ensure that it doesn’t happen to the student that come to this school (Session 2, Line 172-174).

Tony felt that “(...) maybe she [Jen] is like learning from me in a certain way in that area.”

***Collaborative LGBT Work.*** Together, Tony and Jen worked to enhance the educational environment for LGBT students. Because they shared common goals and values, Team 2 celebrated much success. Although this team as worked together for two years, identifying the needs of their transgender student population was an important starting place. According to Jen:

Because that first year, so many students that were identifying as trans and wanting support and just wanting somebody to talk about it. So, that’s kind of how the group got

started. And then the next year we did the panel and turned into a student panel (...)  
(Session 2, Line 121).

Tony and Jen also reflected upon their work with teachers and staff. For example, they acknowledged success through developing a preferred pronoun student roster (Google Docs) for all students in their building. In addition, Team 2 identified barriers with their school Central Management System and reflected upon their advocacy efforts to include fields for preferred pronouns. Lastly, Tony and Jen recognized the importance in providing mentoring opportunities for their LGBT youth. They found meaning in partnering with area colleges and counselors as well as connecting youth to the local Gay Men's chorus.

***Professional Training.*** Team 2 reflected on their professional training with respect to LGBT topics and recognized the need for future work. According to Jen:

In my internship, I formed a relationship with a student where he came out to me. So, It was nice to have, that was my first experience with a student kind of you know, coming out with me. That was just also kind of an experience that not every student is going to have in my program, but I was glad that I got to have it (Session 2, Line 495-500).

Tony felt personally compelled to broach LGBT conversations during his educational leadership program and at administrator conferences as well. Team 2 cited having exposure to LGBT curriculums and data such as GLSEN's *National School Climate Surveys* as invaluable tools for both school counselors and administrators. According to Tony:

I think that the GLSEN's *National School Climate Survey* is a really valuable tool for anybody that is studying to be an educator because it just illuminates the issues that LGBT students face. And I think it should be required readings in any of those programs (Session 2, Line 527).

For Jen, learning how to advocate for her self, role and program was instrumental. She shared:

Whereas the counselor, you are not (...) really sure what your administrator is going to be like. (...) So, one thing that is a big part of our program is being a self-advocate and then learning how to advocate either for yourself or the counseling program (Session 2, Line 539-542).

Lastly, Tony emphasized the need for school districts to embrace progressive practices and move beyond status quos that perpetuate: “we’ve always done it and this is the way it is” (Session 2, Line 605-608).

**Snapshot: Team 3.** Located in the Midwest region, Team 3’s school was a 6-8 middle school. Approximately 662 students attend this school. This school student body is socioeconomically diverse with approximately 13 percent of minority students (i.e., American Indian/Alaskan, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, two or more races). Approximately 23% of students are free lunch eligible; whereas 4% are reduced-price lunch eligible. Four semi-structured interviews were conducted with Team 3 participants. Three of these interviews were facilitated in the respective school; whereas the other two were through telephone. When asked about school setting, the administrator (Beatrice, principal) reported a suburban setting and the school counselor (LR) indicated a small town/rural setting. This school had a culture of respect and dedication towards meeting the unique needs of all students, including LGBT youth. A few inclusive accomplishments include: supporting students who change gender identity, using proper and inclusive language with students and families, forming a GSA, and providing professional development to teachers and staff on LGBT topics.

Team 3 was comprised of one exemplary school counselor (LR) and one administrator (Beatrice, principal). Team 3 had seven years of experience working collaboratively at this

school. In their respective professional areas, LR had 7-10 years of experience and Beatrice had 15 plus. LR openly self-identified as a White or European American, gay female and Beatrice self-identified as a White or European American Jewish female.

LR received numerous awards at the state and national level for her commitment to the LGBT student population. When asked about the LGBT awards during the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Beatrice commented, “Knowing that LR (...) has achieved those awards and that recognition also verifies for me that the answers that she gives me are credible, viable, reliable, and accurate” (Session 3, Line 108). Since three interviews were conducted at this respective school, this researcher was able to view several LGBT-affirming artifacts. While on campus, this researcher took note of safe space icons that were displayed on the outside of the school counseling office. In addition, LR proudly displayed several of her aforementioned awards on her office walls and posted safe space and rainbow icons on her filing cabinets and office walls. A review of public documents revealed that this school had a complete and enumerated anti-bullying and harassment policy. Specific protections based on sexual orientation and transgender status (i.e., gender expression, gender identity or gender non-conformity) were clearly established.

***Meaning-Making in Relationship.*** Taking risks and sharing personally began very early for Team 3. LR recalled her very first meeting with Beatrice when she openly shared her sexual orientation. Both Beatrice and LR reflected and chuckled to Beatrice’s simple response, “That’s okay, I’m Jewish” (Session 2, Line 11-12). LR saw this as a pivotal and defining moment in the relationship and stated, “From that point forward, I think that everything has just been very, very symbiotic and it’s been a fabulous working relationship” (Session 2, Line 14-15). Beatrice described the importance of establishing trust and safety within the relationship. She shared, “I

think you really have to have that open, safe, and trusting piece so that we are traveling as a team” (Session 2, Line 186-187).

Meaning was also derived from building mutual respect and developing a shared passion for supporting all students and families, including LGBT individuals. LR simply stated, “We both have that, it’s about the kids (...) and what’s best for them” (Session 3, Line 202). Whether supporting youth with two moms/two dads or students from divorced/blended families, Team 3 held a collective commitment to social justice issues that embodied: “Any student who comes in, it’s like, you are in the right place” (Session 2, Line 412). For Beatrice and LR, the ability to reflect and share their personal experiences of being in a minority culture (“perspective of being another”) with each other, deepened their appreciation for developing school spaces that are “comforting and comfortable” for all (Session 2, Line 42 and 562). In addition, sharing information and knowing what each member brings and contributes to their joint work for LGBT students was central. According to Beatrice, “I think that LR brings intrinsically to the table is working really, really hard to make others feel welcome and a part of things” (Session 2, Line 126).

Delegating tasks openly and willing to offer contrasting viewpoints on LGBT initiatives was welcomed. Beatrice saw constructive dialogue with LR as an opportunity to reflect upon her own work as an administrator. She explained:

“We know where our differences lie (...). I absorb that as always a lens I have to think about when I am doing certain things and really to think through (...). LR is a great reminder of (...) why am I doing that? Is that still valuable and helpful and is that coming off in a way that is detrimental? (Session 2, Line 450-453).

***Collaborative LGBT Work.*** Meticulous planning was an integral component in Team 3’s advocacy work for LGBT students. Being intentional with LGBT-inclusive language as well as supporting youth who experience and express their gender identity differently was important to Team 3. However, Beatrice and LR believed that small incremental changes helped “push the system” towards a more inclusive and respectful school climate (Session 2, Line 419). For instance, being inclusive to students with disabilities trickled down to looking “at other marginalized groups (...) and how do we change our practice to continue to move forward” (Session, Line 641-643)? Team 3 purposefully did not start with a GSA, but instead worked to get as many staff members on board first through professional development (i.e., safe zone stickers). Beatrice defined this as a “constructivist kind of thing” (Session 2, Line 467) and emphasized the importance in “bringing enough people onboard that you can begin to shift that culture a little bit” (Session 2, Line 602). LR offered another perspective to working with teachers and staff with respect to LGBT initiatives: “Teaching them [teachers] how to fish instead of just giving everyone a fish” (Session 2, Line 264).

Team 3 also maintained their shared commitment to the LGBT student population, regardless when resistance surfaced. Beatrice offered a story about her district’s elementary staff and how they pushed back to learning about the GSA at the middle school. This situation promoted Beatrice to speak up and state, “You just don’t want to deal with any fall out [to the teachers] (...) That’s just not acceptable” (Session 2, Line 536). Beatrice later reflected:

Personally in the district, I’ve been situations where you know, I had to fight and argue a particular perspective and to me, I’m just like, I’m not backing down on that (...). I don’t know if that’s that perspective of being another that I just never been in the dominant

culture, so I have no reason to feel like I need to conform to that dominant culture, you know (Session 2, Line 501-506).

**Professional Training.** Asked about their professional training on LGBT topics, each Team 3 member shared their experiences as well as offered recommendations for preparation programs. LR shared how she was the only out graduate student in her counseling training program and felt personally driven to establish her identity and broach LGBT conversations on day 1. She stated, “Okay, professors, if you are not going to accept me (...) somebody who’s gay, than I’m not going to go through this program (Session 2, Line 673-675). For LR, being intentional and searching for LGBT-welcoming spaces began in her training program and then emerged as she looked for school counselor positions with districts that enumerated protections for sexual orientation. Although Beatrice’s training program did not offer much with respect to LGBT training, she described several ways programs could be strengthened based upon her experiences. She introduced the concept of knowing self, “It’s getting educators to wrestle with that invisible bias and developing that collation collaboration” (Session 2, Line 725). As such, getting individuals to understand who they are and knowing the structure of the school building were invaluable strategies Beatrice offered to strengthen social justice efforts for all students, including LGBT youth.

**Snapshot: Team 4.** Team 4’s school was a 10-12 high school located in the Midwest that serves approximately 1130 students. This school student body is socioeconomically diverse with approximately 16 % of minority students (i.e., American Indian/Alaskan, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, two or more races). Approximately 13.5% are free lunch eligible; whereas 3% are reduced-price lunch eligible. Team 4 consisted of one female exemplary school counselor (SMJ), one male administrator (BC, associate principal/athletic director), and one female school

counselor-in-training (DRM). As noted earlier, SMJ requested that their school counseling intern (DRM) from a neighboring university join with BC and herself to participate in the study. DRM shared about her professional training experiences at the end of the joint interview as well as participated in a follow-up interview with this researcher. That said, a total of five semi-structured interviews were conducted with Team 4 participants. Three of these interviews were facilitated in the respective school and two were conducted via telephone.

During the school visit, the researcher was able to locate a few LGBT-inclusive artifacts. In particular, several affirming posters and resources caught the attention of the researcher during one of the interviews with SMJ. For example, her office posted a Safe Space icon/poster, which served as a visible affirmation of the LGBT community. Also, located on a bookshelf was a collection of LGBT books for students and families. The book entitled, “I Am Jazz” by Jessica Herthel (a book for youth about gender identity) was noticed by the researcher and served as a discussion topic with SMJ. A review of bullying and harassment documents revealed that Team 4’s school provided protection for LGBT students based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

All Team 4 participants self-identified as White or European American. With regards to school setting, BC and DRM reported a suburban setting and SMJ indicated an urban setting. SMJ was named the Educator of the Year from a state level LGBT organization for her exemplary work and service to the LGBT student population in her school building. Recently, BC was presented with a state School Administrator Award as well. When asked to reflect upon her success and the meaning experienced with the award, SMJ (Session 3, Line 142) shared: “This is more about the advocacy than the awards (...) and how you recognize the hard work that

you've done for years and years and years." Team 4 (not including DRM) had 22 years of experience working together at their school.

***Meaning-Making in Relationship.*** At school 4, BC and SMJ attribute the success of their relationship as invaluable for creating a safe and inclusive climate for all students, including LGBT youth. They have mutual respect, trust, and a "student centered" focus (Session 2, Line 23) regarding what is "important for kids" (Session 2, Line 238). For Team 4, this meant: "Trying to meet the needs of all kids regardless of their background and socioeconomic status" (Session 2, Line 25). BC stated the following about how their relationship has evolved and benefitted from 22 years of collaborative work. "Knowing that we're going to do what's best for kids (...) and there's a level of trust there probably from working together for so long" (BC, Line 96).

The school counselor and administrator at school 4 functioned like close and supportive friends. According to BC (Session 2, Line 126), "We laugh a lot." In addition, they support each other, both personally and professionally. BC explained, "Like if we're having a rotten day we come and bounce off [with] each other and vent and release a little bit. That's a good thing to do (...) in our relationship" (Session 2, Line 161). SMJ offered her perspective: "I know that is going to be a sad day for me when he [BC] retires (...) for 22 years, he's been my person that I've gone to" (Session 3, Line 104). For DRM, listening to SMJ and BC reflect as colleagues and friends was a salient and meaningful moment for her during the interview process. During her follow-up interview, she expressed:

They were also friends as well as colleagues (...) not to say that you have to be friends with someone for them to be in your corner for the social issue, but I think that seemed to help them in their situation (...) (Session 3, Line 114-116).

Meaning was also constructed in their relationship through role modeling and being visible during the school day as well as during school functions on weekends and evenings. According to BC (Session 2, Line 136), “ I think we both find it important to be involved in the lives of kids not just during the school day, but outside the school day too.” Because they shared common goals and values, Team 4 welcomed constructive feedback with each other and saw these moments as opportunities to grow and strengthen support within the relationship. BC voiced, “ We’ll disagree, sometimes strongly, but we move on” (Session 2, Line 105). However, collaborative decision-making and willingness to support each other were noted resiliencies when adversity surfaced within the relationship.

***Collaborative LGBT Work.*** Asked about her reasons for partnering with BC on LGBT initiatives, SMJ voiced that his credibility and visibility with youth “brings a lot to the table” (Session 1, Line 609). SMJ voiced, “If BC is involved then it’s going to be (...) a higher credibility than with other administrators” (Session 2, Line 116). SMJ also went out of her way to hold teachers, students, and administrators accountable for addressing the unique needs of LGBT students. She explained: “I think with the administrators, you know, I probably raised the bar a little bit, a lot with them making sure that they were more aware (...) especially with like the GLBT” (Session 1, Line 518-520).

A prior African-American student suicide promoted both SMJ and BC to deepen their commitment towards diversity and served as a catalyst for social justice reform in their school. BC offered his definition this way:

There were just student groups that we felt needed to get started and promote, um to help promote change in our student body and just to (...) provide an opportunity and support groups for (...) all kids regardless of sexual identity (Session 3, Line 8-10).

Bringing LGBT youth together for dialogues and panels, taking youth to conferences and LGBT events, celebrating GLSEN's Day of Silence, and having their state's first transgender high school athlete, were just a few of Team 4's inclusive and collaborative accomplishments.

BC and SMJ also partnered and found meaning from inclusive professional development activities with staff and teachers. As such, empowering LGBT youth to share their personal stories with stakeholders was an approach utilized "to get as many people on board" (Session 2, Line 385). Team 4 believed that addressing staff biases and values was paramount and stated: "You've got to do that in order to have change" (Session 2, Line 344). When asked to describe resistance, if at all, that Team 4 encountered in their journey for and with LGBT students, BC explained, "We just did it" (Session 2, Line 369). He elaborated further: "You just forge forward. You're always going to get resistance (...) and I always took that resistance that they were uncomfortable and they didn't want to deal with it" (Session 2, Line 371-373).

Having support from the Central Office as well as comfort in knowing that they were doing the right thing for youth kept both SMJ and BC motivated and inspired. SMJ discussed with pride: "I know I've been a pain in people's butt's and some people don't like me because (...) I say some of those things and done some of those things (...) I don't know how much I would do differently if I had to re-do it all again" (Session 3, Line 216-219). BC shared, "I think about all the years and some of the different things we've been through and it's kind of amazing" (Session 2, Line 457-458).

**Professional Training.** Over and over, BC emphasized the value and importance he saw in working with his school counselor, SMJ. He shared, "I didn't realize how important working with a school counselor, guidance counselor what they called them back then, was" (Session 2, Line 757-758). BC discussed further:

But they [training program] never talked about how you could use school counselors for your benefit as an administrator and for your students (...) how can you work together (...) It's got to be a totally collaborative process and it's so critical to be with a counselor (...) SMJ is great to work with (...) and so passionate about what she does (Session 2, Line 837-840; Session 3, 183-186).

SMJ described two personal examples that helped to enhance her LGBT cultural competence. SMJ stated, "One was a grad class, Multicultural Issues. We had a (...) gay young man come and spoke (...) that was probably one of the first times that I really, you know heard somebody speak [on LGBT topics]" (Session 2, Line 609-611). SMJ's second influence was an openly gay teacher at school, who shared his personal stories and experiences with her. Team 4 participants commented on a wide range of professional learning activities for school counselors, administrators, and trainees. BC called for purposeful and scheduled meeting times between administrators and counselors: "You just got to make sure we're meeting and discussing those issues [GSA staff sponsorship, transgender youth] and not ignoring them" (Session 3, Line 151-152). In addition, BC called upon administrator organizations to increase education sessions at conferences with respect to supporting LGBT youth as well as the importance that "administration knows what your role is as a school counselor" (Session 2, Line 807).

Team 4 also emphasized the value they saw in offering practical and real-world opportunities for students to learn about administrator-school counselor partnerships. BC explained: "Maybe having practical examples or scenarios about how this can work somehow in their prep program" (Session 2, Line 860-861). SMJ felt that administrators need training about the role and function of school counselors. Using BC as a role model in administrator courses, according to SMJ, "Where he would be a good model to teach that because he just does it"

(Session 3, Line 131-132) was an invaluable strategy provided. DRM referred to the lack of LGBT resources in her training program and highlighted the direction she believed training programs could move towards. She explained:

I want specific preventions to prevent bullying of the LGBT or things like that and I feel like those maybe aren't addressed as much (...) More of personal stories and um, people coming in and talking about (...) educating staff and teachers and um, even the parents.

But yeah, I feel like it might be lacking as far as action items (Session 3, Line 79-83).

Over and over, Team 4 noted the importance of finding support from role models and experts, as an invaluable resource to increase cultural competence. BC stated:

There's so many things that I think are crazy in education that we're not trained for and you just (...) We get thrown to the wolves and you hope you make it and you learn along the way. But, you have to gravitate towards the great people and the ones that are doing the right things (Session 3, Line 233-236).

## **Summary**

Part one of this chapter provided the individual stories and perspectives of each team. From their stories, several overarching themes emerged. These themes include: Learning firsthand, leading by example, intentional partnering, moving beyond turf wars, and pushing the system. The next section of this chapter will explore each of these themes.

## **Cross-Case Analysis-Emergent Themes**

From the individual team stories and experiences, several themes and subthemes emerged. During the first phase of cross-case theme analysis, 37 themes were revealed. Further reduction collapsed the themes to 14. Using phenomenological reduction and reflection, the researcher constructed five overarching themes and 13 subthemes (see Table 3.0).

Table 3: List of Themes

| THEME                      | SUBTHEME   |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. Learning firsthand      | 1.1 Personal stories<br>1.2 Perspective of the other   |
| 2. Leading by example      | 2.1 Role models and risk takers<br>2.2 Educating others  |
| 3. Intentional partnering  | 3.1 Knowing expertise and limitations<br>3.2 Shared commitment to school climate<br>3.3 Support<br>3.4 Proactive recruitment |
| 4. Moving beyond turf wars | 4.1 Shared decision making<br>4.2 Bringing issues forward  |
| 5. Pushing the system      | 5.1 Giving voice to LGBT youth experiences<br>5.2 Strategic planning<br>5.3 Forward vision                                   |

### Theme 1: Learning Firsthand

Learning from personal experience and true stories of LGBT individuals (Learning Firsthand), whether within the school counselor-administrator team or from their own outside network, had a powerful impact for several team members. The data provided numerous examples in which the importance of learning from personal stories as well as putting oneself in the “perspective of the other” had positive meaning making moments within the teams.

**Personal Stories.** Three teams shared positive aspects to having a member of the LGBT community within their team. A recurrent factor that emerged was how hearing the experiences and personal LGBT stories of their counterpart enhanced their teams’ advocacy work for the LGBT student community. In a discussion of her personal journey as a transgender administrator, Genna (Team 1) described how she felt that her story helped change mindsets with her counseling team (G and N) as well as with the entire staff and faculty. Genna explained:

I think they were very open and inclusive to begin with, but after my transition, they saw firsthand, it opened their eyes. They might have had the rose colored glasses on before.

But after that, the glasses were removed and they saw more, you know, this LGBTQ issues that were out there.

N (Team 1) noted that before Genna's transition, she lacked prior exposure and experience with LGBT individuals:

I never had any experience in my home life, or outside, or at the job. I didn't have that experience of somebody going through this change (...) I think that we are more prepared because what we went through with Genna. All of the training that we had, that alone, prepared us to deal with other students in the building.

Likewise, Jen (Team 2) ascribed meaning to having an openly gay administrator (Tony) in the following way:

I went to a high school where there was one gay student who was in the closet, you know most of high school. (...) I don't have gay friends, so having Tony to, um, kind of just discuss his experiences growing up [with] and you know what that looks like. (...) having that (...) individual conversation I think, um, I guess impacted me even more.

Opportunities to hear personal LGBT stories were also found outside of the school counselor-administrator relationships. Team 4 communicated a similar experience to Teams 1 and 2 even though no members self-identified from the LGBT community. For instance, SMJ (Team 4) shared a positive learning experience where an openly gay teacher at school "(...) shared some stories that things that happened to him." SMJ reported how this opportunity illustrated the experience firsthand from an LGBT individual, in a particular manner that she could not experience herself.

Two teams shared that personal LGBT storytelling had a powerful and meaningful impact on their school counselor-administrator bond. For team 1, providing personal support and

friendship to Genna, before and after her transition, helped to strengthen their connection. According to G (Team 1), “When someone shares something with you that is personal and that they haven’t been comfortable sharing with someone else (...), it is an honor. (...) I would say it strengthened our relationship.” Another team 1 member, N, validated the importance of establishing a safe and supportive partnership with her administrator where: “She [Genna] could tell me what was going on in her life.” According to Jen (Team 2) having an out administrator “makes me respect him [Tony] more.” She explained further: “(...) I respect him for putting himself out there for who he is and being true to himself.”

**Perspective of the Other.** Two teams ascribed meaning to “being a member of a marginalized population.” Whether being a member in the LGBT or Jewish community, having personal life experiences “from the background of the other” strengthened the commitment of team members to work collaboratively to address the unique needs of LGBT youth. Tony (Team 2) reflected upon his struggles and personal resilience as a gay man:

Well, I’m gay so I have an experience from high school that was not positive. And I know what that can be like for teenagers when I think that. I make it part of my mission to ensure that it doesn’t happen to the student that come[s] to this school.

Tony believed that his lived experience as a gay man not only inspired his work to create an affirming school climate, but also provided him with a means to get his school counselor counterpart, Jen on board with LGBT issues. In his final interview, Tony introduced the concept of mentoring regarding how he draws from his own experiences to inform and educate Jen. Tony shared: “I’m bringing a perspective that she can’t (...) I’m mentoring her in this area.” He elaborated further by saying, “So I feel like she is like learning from me in a certain way.”

Being a member of a marginalized group also provided meaning to Team 3's work. According to Beatrice (Team 3):

Supporting LR and supporting other students is coming from the background of the other (...). In order to provide that environment that is, um, caring of all, supportive of all, you have to have people that come in from a perspective of that value of all.

LR echoed this sentiment: "And I think that you [Beatrice], being a member of a marginalized population, myself being a member of a marginalized population, bring to the table of how we don't want to be treated." "Being the other," according to team 3, provided meaning and motivation in their work to develop comfortable school spaces for all students, including LGBT youth. Beatrice described the value and benefits that she saw and experienced as a member from a cultural group. She stated:

Anybody that is in a marginalized group. You get the opportunity to be with your own peeps, which is very comfortable you know (...). You share things about the dominant culture that may tick you off (...) and knowing there are parts of that dominant culture that you really don't feel comfortable with (...). I think, um, that LR and I bring to the work (...) how can you be comforting and comfortable for some kids (...).

## **Theme 2: Leading by Example**

Being an active and visible role model (Leading by Example) for LGBT youth was critical for all teams. Teams modeled and inspired students, staff, and faculty to find their voice as an advocate and ally for their LGBT student groups. The data identified common subthemes that reflected the experiences and relationship-building process of the exemplary school counselor-administrator teams, including: role models and risk takers and educating others.

**Role Models and Risk Takers.** All four teams expressed the importance of being visible and supportive to their LGBT youth population. Genna (Team 1) was real candid about the meaning she ascribed for herself as a role model as well as collaborative work with her school counseling team. She disclosed, “I mean it, let’s face it role modeling is probably one of the pieces of the puzzle. Whether it’s me or the guidance counselors or their interactions with me.” Tony (Team 2) concurred, “(...) these students [LGBT] need role models and they need to learn about, see themselves as normal.”

Three teams had members who prescribed meaning to their advocacy roles for LGBT youth through coming out and being open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. However, taking calculated risks and deciding when to openly share their LGBT identity was experienced differently for some team members. According to Tony (Team 2):

I know people that are administrators, other gay people who are administrators in other schools who are not out. And I can’t imagine like going to work everyday and thinking... I would be very lonely. You are hiding this part of yourself that is integral to your identity.

For LR (Team 3) sharing her gay identity was a personal and developmental process. Her story began with establishing herself first as Ms. LR, the school counselor, “who by the way is gay.” LR characterized this as “trying to get my counselor legs under me before my gay legs.”

Despite any personal or professional obstacles, Teams 2 and 3 emphasized the importance to be authentic and real. According to LR, “And that is why I finally chose to come out so that I could be a role model for students (...) that I will be the voice for all of them.” A few teams described the benefits that role modeling had with LGBT youth. According to Jen (Team 2):

Just his [Tony] openness and talking frankly with kids and having those conversations with them is something that I really (...) enjoy at this school. And I enjoy when he is able to share his experiences with students about being, you know, an openly gay man at school. I think it's really important that kids see that especially at a school where we have a lot of students that identify as a part of the LGBT community (...). But I think Tony is interested in talking with them and having that discussion. So I think just being able to be who you are also translates into your relationship with the student.

As such, Tony was eager to point out the importance of having “ (...) diversity on staff because every kid [should have] someone that they can kind of say, that person is the same as me and so they can relate to me.”

Team 1 felt that having an openly transgender administrator opened up doors for youth to share more of themselves and feel comfortable to talk with the school counselor-administrator team. G described the value she saw in Genna's openness with LGBT youth. She stated, “ (...) she has really pioneered a path for people coming out to her (...) to be more able to come forward and be less afraid.” G also expressed, “ (...) loved telling kids to talk to Genna and hearing her experience.” N concurred, “ I really think that since Genna has been here, the kids are more willing to come out and talk about it.” Although Genna modeled safety and support from the unique perspective as being transgender, she argued that the entire school counseling-administrator team were role models and risk takers. She voiced, “I think it's ludicrous to say that I'm the role model, you [school counselors] all are.”

Three teams expressed the ways in which being visible role models inspired teachers and staff to become more involved with LGBT initiatives. For LR (Team 3), this meant wearing LGBT symbols which helped to challenge systemic barriers in the school. She stated:

Every day I wear a rainbow lanyard to be that visible symbol, not just for the LGBTQIA population but to anyone marginalized that I will stand up and be a voice for anyone who doesn't feel safe. If students don't feel safe, they don't come to school, if they don't come to school, they don't learn, if they don't learn, they don't achieve.

Team 1 also felt that their collaborative team modeling for LGBT youth trickled down to staff and teachers becoming more involved. According to G, "So, we always do have a little team that is very supportive. And then it's just a ripple effect that went down to the staff starting the LGBTQ Alliance in our building to support kids." Genna expressed belief that when her teachers and staff modeled acceptance and respect to her as an openly transgender administrator, that fostered acceptance and respect throughout the building with students. Genna shared: "We model (...) everything everyday. Their [teachers and staff] acceptance of me when the students see them talking to me, they [students] pick up our body language." Team 4 created a culture of accountability with teachers, staff, and administration as a role model for her LGBT students. According to SMJ, "I think with the administrators, you know, I probably raised the bar a little bit. A lot with them making sure that they were more aware (...) especially with like the GLBT (...) stuff."

**Educating Others.** All four teams communicated the importance of "leading by example" in terms of extending their collaborative work for LGBT students outside of their school building. They informed others within and outside of their school communities regarding their best practices for LGBT youth. Team 1 reflected upon their collaborative work to support LGBT students through sharing programs and consulting regularly with school counselors and administrators in neighboring districts. For example, Genna (Team 1) emphasized the

importance of educating others as a guest and/or keynote speaker at education conferences. She shared:

It's about how can each and every one of us, not only accept each other, but educate the people who are not accepting. And, will we reach everybody, no. I can tell you that after I get done speaking a lot of times, um, people come up to me (...) and say, 'Gee, I never knew. It makes sense now. You've cleared up a lot of my misconceptions.'

BC (Team 4) noted the value of educating other school administrators and athletic directors on LGBT practices such as GSA's and ways to support transgender youth. He also acknowledged that not all schools adhere to LGBT-inclusive practices. He explained, "A lot of schools aren't there yet. They don't have support groups for those students. They don't have organizations. Not all schools engage in this work." BC elaborated further, "It's been interesting how many calls I've gotten (...) from other Athletic Directors and how I deal with transgender students participating in athletics and activities (...). It's kind of been a hot topic."

Beatrice (Team 3) discussed with pride her role in challenging administrator mindsets with respect to student diversity and inclusion practices at state and regional conferences. She shared, "I was talking to other school principals and (...) [they] were flabbergasted because (...) I started talking about inclusionary practices and their jaws just dropped." LR (Team 3) expressed a form of gratitude towards Beatrice for allowing her to attend and share her expertise in LGBT issues at state and national events. According to LR, "I give her everything that I have and (...) she [Beatrice] affords me then that time to go and to help put [our] school on the map."

A few teams credited the awards and recognition events with helping to bolster their education and advocacy efforts on behalf of LGBT students. Beatrice (Team 3) believed that LR's "awards are symbols" and that "something good is going on." Although the awards made

team members proud, remaining humble, giving back, and educating others was salient. Beatrice expressed,

To me the value of all of those things [awards] is being able to take that story that we share and being able to take that, you know, regionally, statewide, nationally (...) to be able to broaden that spear of influence.

LR concurred, “I do think the awards have given me some credibility and the platform from which to educate more people. People look at us and they’re like wow, they must be doing something right.” Similarly, Genna (Team 1) acknowledged, “It empowers me now to have that, to speak. For people now to say, hey, this person is creditable. This person, you know, somebody that should be given a soapbox.” In addition, Genna believed that her awards provided additional outlets to “educate and speak on behalf of others that don’t have that voice. That aren’t respected in the community.”

### **Theme 3: Intentional Partnering**

All four teams interviewed for this study spoke to the evolving and purposeful construct of their collaborative journey working together for LGBT youth. Elements of intentionality were shared among the team participants when discussing their collaborative experiences in working with LGBT youth. The following data portrays the spirit of partnership and intentional team experiences, including: Knowing expertise and limitations, shared commitment to school climate, professional and personal support, and proactive recruitment.

**Knowing Expertise and Limitations.** Knowing who you are as an advocate as well as believing in your work for LGBT youth was important to all teams. Teams expressed that ongoing self-reflection regarding their strengths and areas for growth was essential, which ultimately lead them to partner with their team member for and with LGBT youth. Believing in

yourself and work, according to Beatrice (Team 3), was an important starting place. She explained: “I really believe in I guess, that notion of administrative efficacy that the work that I do makes change and those changes make other changes.” She expressed a form of belief and resilience despite others’ not knowing exactly her mission and purpose. She stated: “(...) I know that certain things I did even though other people around me didn’t know what I was doing (...) and you know it ended up paying off.”

Team 2 understood their limitations when addressing students who challenged the learning and reading of books with gay characters. In particular, Tony tried to view these moments as an opportunity for self-reflection and consulted with his vice principal and his school counselor, Jen. Tony reflected, “ (...) I tend to get a little bit heated sometimes and I know that is not appropriate, so I let him [vice principal] handle it.” According to his school counselor Jen, knowing the strengths and limitations of each member as well as knowing where to locate support and resource outside of the relationship was critical. “Using each other’s strengths in the situation” was an invaluable strategy and experience for Team 2.

Three teams expressed the importance of self-reflection; however, introduced the concept through identifying personal strengths and areas of expertise with respect to LGBT topics. Teams aligned their work with their talents, skills, and specializations, which enhanced their purpose and pride. Genna (Team 1) reported:

I know what my strengths are (...) I’m not expert in everything nor do I pretend to be (...). I know who (...) should be doing what based on their expertise (...) So, I reach out, you know, when I know I need assistance in a particular area. And I think that is what we have been doing for years (...) And that’s what a good administrator does, whether they are gay or not.

Team 3 also verbalized their perceptions and assessment of skills that complimented their work for and with LGBT youth. Beatrice believed that her team had proper balance (“good yin and yang”), despite being opposites. According to Beatrice:

Our personalities are complete opposites, but our value structure being the same is what I think, you know partly holds that together (...). Understanding each other in both of those ways plus that value structure I think has (...) allowed us to really move the building forward in ways that we both (...) share that social justice.

Team 3 also experienced a benefit from knowing and tapping the strengths of each team member when supporting social justice issues, including LGBT youth. According to Beatrice:

You know part of being in a minority culture right, is not everybody knows your culture. So for me, I rely on LR (...). Whether it's background knowledge [LGBT] in what to do, how to support kids, how to work with families, policy considerations, you know, best practice. I mean all of those I guess are pieces that LR can really help making that making (...) for. (...) Because I know LR has um, that vision and that support structure (...). She spends a lot of time thinking about LGBTQ issues. (...) You know, LR would ask me a lot of questions about Judaism.

Team 4, too, discussed the benefit of leveraging strengths as well as bringing the right administrator on board when supporting LGBT youth. SMJ believed that an administrator with established credibility and trust with students helped to maximize their team's LGBT student efforts. As such, SMJ saw her administrator's (BC) commitment, passion, and involvement to develop an affirming school climate as a meaningful tool to advance her work with this student population. She offered her reflection in the following way, “So that credibility I think (...) brings a lot to the table.” In addition to knowing themselves as advocates as well as their

strengths and limitations, teams also took intentional steps to develop a collective vision towards school climate.

**Shared Commitment to School Climate.** Each team also chose to partner and intentionally work together for LGBT youth because of their growing commitment, vision, and values to school climate and safety. Having similar philosophies was important and for many teams that drew them even closer together. In fact, all of the teams expressed the importance of an inclusive school climate as a fundamentally shared view in their partnerships. Team 4's efforts to support LGBT youth through student groups (i.e., GSA's, dialogues, panel) were heavily influenced by their shared vision and philosophy. BC expressed, "There were just student groups that we felt needed to get started (...) and to help promote change in our student body (...) regardless of sexual identity." He also mentioned, "Really having that shared vision. You know, counselors working closely with administration and then sharing that viewpoint and talking about (...) how can we meet those needs of kids [LGBT]." Similarly, SMJ stated her reasons for partnering with BC on LGBT issues, "I would go to him more because just similar philosophies with dealing with things that knew things would get done if I went to him with situations with students and things like that."

Team 2 recollected their shared commitment to school safety, "So a student does feel comfortable in that space." And Jen expressed, "One of our biggest values is that students feel safe." It was evident that Team 2 as well as their school community (i.e., students, teachers, staff) were committed and engaged to create spaces where LGBT students could authentically be themselves. According to Tony:

Generally, day to day (...) almost half of our population is LGBT and so inevitable we are all going to be working with those kids and so you have to trust not just the counselors, but everybody on staff is inclusive of them.

Understanding of the mission and vision towards LGBT youth were clear within Team 2 and as a result influenced staff and teachers in apparent and meaningful ways. Tony reflected upon his role as administrator and observing the daily practices and procedures of teachers to support gender nonconformity youth. He shared:

Look, I've sat in on classes where they are discussing, it's not just written down on a note card, but it's like, 'Introduce yourself, tell what your preferred pronouns are, and something interesting about yourself.' So it's completely normal and it's like nobody has to feel like they are being other'd in that situation. Or that it is a secret.

Team 1 shared a vision to meet the individualized needs of all students-socially, culturally, and educationally. Genna referenced the recent debate over transgender bathrooms in schools and insisted that:

Bathrooms are not a problem, wherever you want to use, you use. My job is to protect all students and ensure that everybody feels safe. That is what their job is also. So, you know, we accommodate their needs, whether it is emotional, social, you know, physical.

Likewise, Team 3 supported a shared vision to making their school building more welcoming to LGBT youth; however, they focused on expanding social justice concerns with other student groups. Because Team 3 shared similar values and Beatrice considered LR as the "expert" with LGBT initiatives in the building, they were able to intentionally enhance the school climate for other marginalized groups. Beatrice reflected about the benefits she experienced:

(...) that allows me then to say, Okay, so what different marginalized group am I going to focus my energies on? You know, because I know she's got that [LGBT]. (...) If there are things that pop up, LR will let me know. Um, but I don't have any staff of color (...) then I can work more with um, you know, students of color and issues they're facing being in a building with all white staff every day.

Team 4 expressed a vision and focus for helping youth develop, nurture, and self-sustain social justice efforts beyond high school. Planting the seeds for youth to be social justice advocates and allies in community events such as Caucus activities on college campuses was represented and reflected within Team 4's partnership. Lastly, all but two teams discussed the importance of establishing common values in terms of supporting LGBT teachers and staff in their buildings. Team 2 and 4 talked about the significance of having other role models join in their efforts and break down barriers for the LGBT community. In particular, BC (Team 4) expressed his support for an openly gay teacher at his school, "He was so highly respected as an educator. He broke down a lot of misconceptions because of his example and the way he lived his life." In addition to developing a shared vision, team members also found meaning from integrating personal and professional stories as well as supports within their working relationships.

**Support.** All teams in this study shared the impact of support on their collaborative LGBT work. Types of support included personal support and friendship within their relationships as well as district-level support.

**Professional Support.** Two teams noted that part of what contributed to their collaborative efforts for LGBT youth was an understanding of the role and function of a school counselor. For BC (Team 4), understanding the professional role and duties of his school

counselor (SMJ) seemed to be a meaningful part of Team 4's work with marginalized student groups. BC voiced:

I didn't realize how important working with a school counselor (...) was (...) And there are so many needs that need to be met for students that it's just so critical to work with the (...) counselor's because we see kids at a different level. We [BC and SMJ] don't see them in the classroom and the academic part of it. We see a lot of the issues, the problems they have outside the classroom, like home life, sexuality, um, the color of their skin. (...) But we see that and we have to work with that and meet the needs of those kids and you can't do it alone. It's got to be a totally collaborative process and it's so critical to be with a counselor.

Likewise, for LR (Team 3) having the school board, administrators, teachers, and even the mayor know that she was "good for all kids," established the groundwork and confidence for her to forge ahead in LGBT-related advocacy. She noted, "Even before they knew [stakeholders] that I was gay, they knew that I was good for kids (...) I had the teachers in and the administrator just had my back on everything." Team 1 and 4 expressed the importance of having support from educational stakeholders (i.e., school board, superintendent). Team 4 felt that regular communication as well as data-driven practices and the ASCA National Model helped "explain why you do what you do" to stakeholders. With regard to school community (i.e., teacher, parent, and student) and gender identity trainings at school 1, Genna ensured, "Everybody had a hand in it."

When asked about their accomplishments (i.e., LGBT awards and recognition events) three teams had members who felt that their recognized efforts enhanced their work and bolstered a supportive network with other professionals. Tony (Team 2) expressed that because

of his recognition, he hoped: “that it would just open up opportunities for the school” as well as “share the work” on a larger macro level. For SMJ (Team 4), she saw her award as an opportunity to help change the mindsets of others, even if that meant others (i.e., family members, teachers, staff) were uncomfortable. However, LR prescribed meaning to her non-LGBT awards (i.e., Educator of the Year) in the following way:

In addition to the awards for LGBT advocacy, I think it is almost more so important to have the other awards before I can advocate for my community. I have mentioned that I am a school counselor first and foremost. By winning those awards, my work with all students is legitimized, and therefore not scrutinized when I do advocate for those marginalized [LGBT]. I feel that my awards open doors and give me credibility.

***Personal Support.*** In addition to professional support, all teams expressed the importance of knowing each other beyond their professional roles. Having a safe space to share openly and authentically with each other was valued. Genna (Team 1) expressed:

I feel for people to really be successful in the professional environment, we have to support each other (...). We share our personal experiences, we always have. And even if it is not for advise, we just lend the ear, you know, we listen.

Similarly, Tony and Jen (Team 2)-both of whom had only worked 2 years together-felt that having an “outside of work relationship” benefited their relationship. Sharing things that weren’t work related as well as taking “just a few minutes to check-in” provided support and respect and, as Jen articulated: “(...) makes them more human, rather than just a colleague who I happen to work at the same place with.” Likewise, for Team 4, it was critical to have a space to laugh and release stress and, as BC shared “we laugh a lot.” Being able to bounce ideas off one

another and vent was made easier for Team 4 by establishing a supportive working relationship. BC noted, “It’s about building relationships invisible.”

Team 3 noted that advocacy work for marginalized groups, including LGBT youth can be draining, especially “(...) when you’re not a part of the dominant culture.” Team 3 also found their relationship as a place to cry, relieve stress, and re-focus. Beatrice shared:

I mean there are times that LR has brought me in her office and just been blehhhh and there are times I brought LR in my office and I’ve been blehhhh... you know and there’s been tears of joy and (...) frustration (...). You’re going to move so much further if you have those pieces.

Knowing that advocacy work for and with LGBT youth can be draining and takes time, Team 3 intentionally incorporated wellness check-ins with each other. LR offered her perspective in the following way, “making sure she [Beatrice] can do what she needs to do allows me to do what I need to do.” LR recalled and reflected upon her role with wellness:

(...) if there are things that I can do in my job, to help protect her [Beatrice] so that she can do the bigger picture kind of things, that’s me. (...) I don’t want to be principal, so I am going to do what I can over here you know, to life her up, so she can be at her best.

Referring to Team 4’s story on personal support, DRM (Team 4, trainee) reflected upon her own professional development and future work as a school counselor. Specifically, she recalled:

(...) I need to find someone and develop that relationship with in my own professional development (...). They [BC and SMJ] kind of talked about, you know, knowing each other on a more personal level and that seems like that might be where it starts with (...) They were also friends as well as colleagues, um, not to say that you have to be friends

with someone for them to be in your corner for the social issue, but I think that (...) seemed to like help them in their situation.

**Proactive Recruitment.** Two teams utilized intentionality during their hiring practices to locate a school and/or counterpart that matched their values towards the LGBT community. Intentional planning as well as finding the right fit and balance was important, especially for Teams 2 and 3. LR (Team 3) reflected upon her job search several years ago and recalled: “I am going to look for a district and administrator who is supportive of me being gay.” With uncertainty regarding how parents and the community may respond, she searched for a supportive administrator as well as enumerated policies with respect to sexual orientation, with intention. Likewise, Beatrice (Team 3) was intentional in her hiring practices and searched for individuals who had an appreciation for social justice and the ability to bring “that value structure forward.” Beatrice indicated, “You have to have people that come in from a perspective of that value of all.”

Team 2 offered a contrasting story with respect to their intentional recruiting practices. Tony talked about his negative experiences with a former school counselor as motivating his interests to find a school counselor who would engage and partner on LGBT initiatives. He recalled, “ I didn’t feel like she [former school counselor] found me as a mentor,” and therefore Tony was intentional in his hiring practices. In particular, he voiced, “It’s intentional practice” a “hiring practice to look for people that we think are a fit with the school and a fit with our philosophy. Jen clicked very quickly with us.” For Jen, her motivation and interests in finding a school that matched her progressive values and commitment to student diversity was also intentional. Recollecting her prior experiences in working at an online school and the desire to

work face-to-face with students, Jen felt her work with Tony was an excellent philosophical fit and as she described, “Too good to be true.”

#### **Theme 4: Moving Beyond Turf Wars**

All teams in this study recognized that shared decision-making was a collaborative process as well as a necessary ingredient to a successful administrator-counselor relationship. Administrators and counselors at all of the schools believed that collaboration was critical with initiatives that influenced positive student outcomes, including LGBT youth. As such, meaning was derived from open communication and shared decision-making as compared to turf wars and compliance to hierarchical decision-making from the sole administrator. The data provided examples regarding how the teams ascribed meaning to their shared work for LGBT youth through shared decision-making, teachable moments, and the ability to bring difficult issues and conversations forward in their partnerships.

**Shared Decision-Making.** Each team understood that shared decision-making was an essential skill and practice in their relationships. For instance, the school counselors and administrator in Team 1 made sure that communication was a daily practice with themselves as well as with teachers. Team 1 recalled their collaborative and complementary approach to supporting and working with transgender youth and shared their process, including: (1) teachers may first approach the school counselors (G and N) with concerns; (2) school counselors would provide school-based counseling to the students; and (3) Genna (administrator) would have her door open to share her personal experiences. Team 1 had a shared understanding that their work with transgender youth was a “delicate process of conversations and permissions,” therefore trust, collaboration, and ongoing communication were prevalent within Team 1’s relationship.

Similarly, Team 2 was comfortable in their collaborative roles and felt like they were “often on the same page about how to approach and solve a problem.” In particular, Tony talked about their overlap in roles (“cross over”) and articulated the value he saw in combining his administrator skills with his counterparts. Tony expressed:

She [Jen] doesn’t worry like if you are going to take this and have this conversation with this kid-that doesn’t mean that I’m doing a bad job. It means that you have something else to add (....) Or knowing when like you can’t relate to a student or you don’t really know what to say and so then passing it to somebody that does.

Both Teams 1 and 2 spoke about their experience handling discipline issues, often times collaboratively. Specifically, Team 1 emphasized the importance of “counseling and education” and shared, “Every mistake is an opportunity to teach here.” Likewise, Team 2 held a collective commitment to providing teachable moments to their students. Tony shared: “We figured out discipline and the counselors play a huge role (...). We would rather spend time with our students discussing the issues they have and their behaviors than punishing their behavior with arbitrary consequences.”

For Team 2, this philosophical agreement was beneficial when responding to student discipline concerns such as when students do not adhere to the inclusive school practices. When an issue surfaced, often times Tony and Jen would work with the student collaboratively. Tony shared:

Where at [our] school, [we have] a relationship where you can do it together. Where you are basically sending two messages at the same time. One is, you know, you are not adhering to our values and that needs to start happening in a more authoritative way, but

also let's talk about what the issue of the value is and why it is important with the counselor's perspective. So doing it together, I think adds more weight.

Although Jen “was really glad to be a part of those conversation[s],” she was also transparent with Tony that she did not “want to administer the discipline.” She shared, “I’m happy to have a frank conversation, but the discipline on whatever it may be, comes from you [Tony].” In addition to the team member’s shared experiences with decision-making, Teams 3 and 4 found perspective taking opportunities in their joint work. BC (Team 4) understood that he needed his school counselor (SMJ) to be involved in many decisions on initiatives that impacted student groups as well as safe and inclusive school climate and culture practices. He voiced:

I can’t do my job successfully without [her] help. It’s good to share and bounce ideas off somebody you can trust and respect (...) I think a lot of the decisions we make for students is shared decision-making between administration and counseling. I think it has to be. We’re in it together. Everything from scheduling (...) to student groups (...), discipline, behavior, climate and culture of the school. All of that together, we’ve got to work together.

Likewise, Beatrice (Team 3) welcomed and respected her counterpart’s perspective. Beatrice would often ask LR questions such as, “What about this? What do I need to know?” when discussing school-wide educational initiatives. Other administrators and counselors highlighted the significance they experienced in being able to bring issues, whether positive or difficult, forward to their counterpart.

**Bringing Issues Forward.** All teams spoke about the impact of trust and their willingness to bring issues forward to their counterparts. In particular, Team 2 insisted that LGBT initiatives came from either counterpart. Tony (Team 2) viewed leadership as not the sole

responsibility of an administrator, but welcomed the ideas from his entire school team. He voiced:

And from my perspective, you need to have the attitude of the school leader that you are going to support the staff and recognize what they are telling you. You know, Jen [school counselor] comes to me with an issue that I haven't actually seen or know about, I need to be able to trust her that her solution is going to be impactful.

Tony further argued that leadership is a shared initiative with multiple school leaders:

You hear other stories from administrators that are like, it's just top down and you don't like listen to their staff. And that seems dangerous almost, like you are not actually addressing the needs of your school if you don't listen to your people.

Jen echoed Tony's comments and shared, "I do get a say in what we are communicating to students because of that trust."

Genna (Team 1) also inspired and encouraged her school counseling team to speak up and bring LGBT initiatives (i.e., No Name Calling Week, Ally pledges) forward to her. Having this autonomy "to come to her [Genna]" was especially important for G. "And I think a lot of the trust comes from the fact that she knows that we will bring the important issues forward and vice versa. She does want us to speak up," said G. In similar fashion, Teams 3 and 4 spoke about being comfortable enough in their roles to engage in difficult conversations about social justice concerns.

As Beatrice (Team 3) described: "I think you really have to have that open and safe, trusting piece so that we are traveling as a team." With trust established, both LR and Beatrice would respect and welcome disagreements. Both LR and Beatrice shared and expressed the difficulty in knowing that LGBT initiatives at the district level happened at a slower pace "than

[they] would like.” Understanding her organizational culture, Beatrice recollected an exchange with LR where she had to tell her, “Not now!” This situation included addressing LGBT-related initiatives. Likewise, LR felt comfortable to initiate difficult dialogues and articulate her viewpoints to Beatrice. She shared: “I also tell her [Beatrice] when I don’t agree with her on things as well. So, oh we’ve had, yes, we’ve gone toe to toe on some things. I mean, she’s called me out on stuff too.”

In addition to engaging in difficult conversations, two teams discussed the significance of finding compromise as well as knowing the right time to broach difficult conversations with each other. In particular, Team 4 emphasized the importance in finding common ground and understanding when both counterparts’ differ, whether on LGBT topics or not. SMJ felt strongly that both herself and BC had an open and trustworthy alliance “to talk to each other about differences of opinions and things like that.” LR (Team 3) mentioned that knowing the right to talk with Beatrice was important. She explained, “We’ve worked together for seven years, so I know the time when to and when not to (...) she knows if I walk in and if I close the door, she closes her laptop.” In essence, developing concise talking points and only going to Beatrice with “big stuff that she has to fix” was an important part of Team 3’s collaborative decision-making process. In addition to engaging in purposeful and productive conversations, the administrators and counselors in these schools also took the initiative to extend their collaborative work by challenging and pushing their school systems to provide support for LGBT youth.

### **Theme 5: Pushing the System**

All teams were willing to take risks and challenge the status quo across multiple levels on behalf of youth. Teams expressed that LGBT students faced multifaceted barriers and hurdles and therefore not enough was being done to challenge, change, and shape their school climates

as well as within the broader field of education. Team 4 discussed at length about the importance of pushing the system. According to Beatrice:

I think the passion that LR and I share-it's really on supporting the student (...). If it needs to be, you know, pushing the system, I'm fine. Pushing the system on behalf of the student because it's what the student needs.

Trust and having a shared vision helped many of these teams break through systemic barriers and create educational opportunities for all students, including LGBT youth. As such, this collaborative-advocacy process included a variety of experiences for these teams, ranging from promoting LGBT youth experiences, challenging educator and student mindsets, and strategic planning to identifying a future vision and path for LGBT students.

**Giving Voice to LGBT Youth Experiences.** Teams were compelled to make sure that LGBT youth “felt heard and they felt like somebody.” For example, three teams talked about their shared value with establishing LGBT youth groups (i.e., GSAs) as well as promoting youth self-advocacy to ensure students “felt they had a voice.” In particular, Team 4 strongly believed that LGBT students should have a support group and/or organization and to ensure that the group is “(...) as important as any other students’ organization might have.” SMJ (Team 4) also talked about giving voice LGBT students through attendance at conferences as well as having them join her at the recognition event when she was received her LGBT award.

Likewise, Team 2 worked hard to ensure LGBT students were not “misgendered” and represented through school activities (i.e., plays) as well as embedded throughout the curriculum. In particular, Tony (Team 2) cited an example of having to “push the system” and recollected an exchange with a student who opposed to learning about the LGBT culture. According to Tony, the student said: “Well, I don’t have a problem with being with these students [LGBT] in classes

and stuff, but I don't want to learn about it." Despite the opposition from both the student and parents, Tony and Jen worked together and did not back down. For example, Jen said to the student, "Well, why don't we learn about them and their experiences (...) they are human too and have a difference experience. And even though you might not agree with (...) being gay, you can still learn about it."

Two teams discussed the critical need for education with teachers and staff as compared to their general student population. BC (Team 4) shared, "It's amazing to me how the students are like, 'Oh, no big deal.' It's the adults that can't deal with it." Likewise, Genna (Team 1) felt that students were open and accepting to diversity as well as more concerned with "what is on the lunch menu" than a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Genna also described a situation when she personally felt supported by her students in response to media inquiries regarding her gender transition. According to Genna, the youth said, "So what. It's okay. This is not a big issue."

**Challenging Mindsets.** Two teams expressed the idea of "pushing the system" through educating their teachers and staff about LGBT youth experiences. Whether confronting staff because "comments or their viewpoints have been inappropriate in the educational setting" or the need to "feel uncomfortable," team members were aware of their collaborative vision for advocacy with teachers and staff. Team 3 talked about enlisting staff involvement to help "push the system" towards LGBT equality. LR explained, "So, if we could have staff buy in on Day of Silence or Ally Week or whatever it was, then again, it wasn't me pushing anything to the students, but it was changing the mindset of the staff." However, Team 3 found that there were also times in which they had to "fight and argue a particular perspective" and speak up on behalf of LGBT students. Beatrice referred to resistance that herself and LR encountered from middle

school teachers in orienting 5<sup>th</sup> grade students to various clubs, including the GSA. She firmly stated:

The kids put that on there and you mean to me, I have to go back and tell the kids that that's not acceptable. I'm not going to do that (...) You just don't want to deal with any fall out. I said, that's just not acceptable.

Team 4 deliberately utilized the voices and experiences of LGBT youth within school-wide dialogues and panels to challenge student, teacher, and staff mindsets. BC shared “They’re [LGBT students] our best advocates many times because students listen to them instead of an adult preaching to them. Um, so their experiences that they’ve had and the impact that they have on other kids, that’s invaluable.” SMJ, who often organized the student-led groups, explained: “When I heard those things [youth stories] it changed my life so much (...). You can just see their minds changed after they hear those stories.” Having worked together for over 22 years, SMJ reflected upon the growth and change that she noticed with her counterpart, BC with respect to LGBT issues. From her perspective, BC learned “a lot with being involved in some of the things that we did” and perhaps he became even more of an advocate for the LGBT student community in response to some of the personal stories that he heard in the youth groups.

DRM (Team 4, trainee), too, felt inspired from listening to Team 4’s experiences with LGBT youth and working with teachers, staff, and students. And she said:

Um, I really liked when they [SMJ and BC] talked about when they had students share their stories with groups of faculty. Um, because I found just in my educational experience that bringing in panels of people to share their experience maybe that’s just because we’re counselors and we like to get to know people, but I think that’s powerful having people just share their story.

In addition to challenging staff mindsets, teams expressed the importance of being strategic about change for LGBT students.

**Strategic Planning.** Three teams articulated that in order to “push the system” on behalf of LGBT students, they must have a thoughtful and collaborative plan to get there. Although strategic planning occurred in different school contexts, these teams stressed the value and meaning they prescribed to their strategic work in their school settings. Of all the teams, Team 3 spoke at great lengths to their strategic experiences for LGBT students. In particular, Team 3 recalled the importance of self-examination and knowing your school culture as a meaningful starting point. Referring to their reflective process, Beatrice added, “How do you make systems change because it’s a systems thing” and further added, “When the time is right and it’s there, let’s push and I will support you [LR] in that.”

In addition to knowing their school culture and community, Team 3 believed in small incremental change for their LGBT youth population, which evolved from prior success with other marginalized groups, such as students with disabilities. Nevertheless, Team 3 was intentional and strived to “have enough people with the vision” to help shift their “culture a bit” for LGBT students. Team 3 purposefully did not start with a GSA and chose to strategically advocate through staff development and professional initiatives (i.e., safe zone stickers in all classrooms). Although LR and Beatrice held a shared vision and desire to “push their system,” they also understood that advocacy for LGBT youth requires patience and time. According to Beatrice:

I was very meticulous in building up our case on many, many fronts so that it wouldn’t get squashed. So I wanted to win the war even if we had to lose a few battles and so, planning the seed on things.

Teams 1 and 3 shared their proactive philosophy to change the status quo for LGBT in their school buildings. According to Genna (Team 1), “You have to solve the quality of life issues with small ones and they won’t become big issues.” Addressing LGBT bullying right away as well as connecting with school counselors in the home schools, helped Team 1 to avoid “brush[ing] it under the rug.” Likewise, Team 2 expressed their strategic experiences to ensure that LGBT youth were safe and respected while at school. In particular, Team 2 mentioned the importance of informing all potential and current students about their school’s commitment to diversity and inclusion on day 1. Tony and Jen were strategic during building tours regarding diversity and inclusive school practices and procedures (i.e., novels with gay characters, drag pageant talent shows, marriage equality discussions, etc.) with students in efforts to “avoid issues in the future.” Tony explained:

You don’t want to offend anybody and you don’t want to tell them they are wrong, but at the same time you want to communicate like, this is what we find important here- inclusive curriculum. You know that is what you are getting when you come here.

Teams also highlighted the significance in sustaining a positive focus and maintaining resilience when “pushing their systems” towards LGBT youth equality.

**Forward Vision.** All teams reflected upon and celebrated their accomplishments for LGBT youth; however, they also expressed the work that remains ahead of them. Team 4 expressed an urgency to support LGBT youth given the recent political climate in the country. BC (Team 4) reflected that “It’s kind of interesting how some schools are very uncomfortable and others deal with it quite well.” Having a clear vision for the future of LGBT students was instrumental for BC and SMJ. BC revealed:

We got to make sure that we're not losing ground and keep pushing forward. I mean, there's issues out there in our country (...) the restroom thing. You know, we can't ignore those issues. Talk about them. Um, communicate with kids (...). I think that is important that we continue to do that and have those discussions with kids.

Over and over, Team 4 believed that the key to developing a safe and inclusive school climate, "(...) where everybody feels comfortable and it works for everyone" was a productive and positive school counselor-administrator team. According to BC, "There's got to be a good positive working relationship between the two and respect between the two to make it work in all issues." Sustaining a positive spirit even in the face of student adversity was very important to Team 4. BC reflected, "I know that we didn't change their mind, but they at least learned." As such, relying on each other as well as mentors and leaders helped overcome some of these issues. BC reflected, "(...) you have to gravitate towards the great people and the ones that are doing the right things."

Aligned with these ideas, Team 2 highlighted the importance of seeking new opportunities and developing new partnerships that benefit LGBT youth. Tony stated, "And I think that I am always continually looking for those things that are mission and vision fit that benefit our students. And I always will." Although Team 2 felt that much for their work for LGBT students "just tends to happen" organically, developing multi-level interventions were clearly spelled out. For instance, Tony highlighted his future goals in "try[ing] to make waves in other places" through partnerships with GLSEN chapters as well as with the local Gay Men's Chorus. However, Tony was clear that his professional activities at the macro level should not take away from his responsibilities and obligations to his students.

Similarly, Team 3 spoke to LGBT initiatives at the macro level and also cited the importance of finding balance multilevel activities. LR explored a variety of goals including work with Human Rights Campaign, developing sessions at state school counselor conferences, as well as a long-term goal of writing a book for school counselors and their work with LGBT youth. Like Team 4, Team 3 also felt an urgency to strengthen student and family diversity. According to LR, “And again, its advocating for all families because we are going to have more students who are questioning and transitioning.” In addition, LR felt inspired to engage in interdisciplinary work. She stated, “I really want to push more of the school counseling profession to administrators and to school boards (...).

Team 1 developed and communicated a future vision for LGBT youth as well. However, with Genna’s retirement occurring at the end of the interview process, each team member offered a unique perspective regarding their vision and future work for LGBT students. G and N both reflected upon the importance of continuing their partnership for LGBT students with their new administrator. According to N, “We need to continue because there are more and more students every year [LGBT] and are getting the courage to come out and talk about their needs” and further explained, “I’m sure since we are all educated more that we are going to push it.” Genna reflected upon her journey in education, both personally and professionally. She called for more prevention and intervention at the elementary level to help educators understand what bullying looks like for LGBT students as well as “informing the teachers, what are trans people.” From her experiences in education, Genna also emphasized the need for school board training with respect to LGBT topics. She stated:

And the trainings should include board members. Because often times board members are the ones that will stop something from happening because their fearful of the consequences of some of the people in their own district might try and do.

Personally, Genna felt compelled to give back and support other transgender youth and their families. Genna reflected, “I just hope that I can lead by example.” As such, helping transgender youth develop strengths and resiliencies through self-help books was one of many recommendations provided by Genna. She also felt motivated and personally inspired to help others find their voice in change for LGBT students, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or status. She inspired hope through this closing phrase, “And it doesn’t always have to be somebody of same or someone’s who’s rich (...) it just takes one individual who (...) is able to start something and bring it to the forefront.”

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the study. The first section of the chapter presented the within case analysis, which outlined each individual teams’ working relationship and meaning-making experience collaborating for and with LGBT students. The second segment of the chapter explored the cross-case analysis, which presented the give themes that emerged from the data. The final chapter will provide a discussion of the results as well as outline implications for practitioners (i.e., school counselors, administrators), training programs, and future research.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of school counselor-administrator teams in their work with LGBT students. The first two chapters outlined information from current literature regarding the needs of LGBT youth in schools, the role and function of school counselors and administrators with LGBT students, and school counselor-administrator partnerships. The third chapter presented the methods and procedures in which this study was conducted. The fourth chapter presented the experiences and the meaning making process of four school counselor-administrator teams who partnered in their work for LGBT youth. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the significance of those experiences to this study through the five primary themes that surfaced. In addition, implications for practitioners, training programs, and researchers will be provided.

#### **Discussion of Themes**

The five themes that emerged from this study contribute insight regarding how these school counselor-administrator teams make meaning of their relationship experiences with LGBT students. The team members interviewed in this study had an average total of 44 years experience working together; with experience that ranged from as little as two years together to over 20 years. Although no team shared identical experiences, the common themes that were important among the team experiences included: learning firsthand, leading by example, intentional partnering, moving beyond turf wars, and pushing the system.

**Theme 1: Learning Firsthand.** How do school counselors and administrators make meaning with their relationships in their work with LGBT students? An important source of influence and meaning making for each school counselor-administrator team was listening to and

learning firsthand from LGBT experiences and stories. Each team had a unique perspective to offer. Some reflected that hearing personal LGBT histories had the potential to inspire and motivate them toward a desired goal of creating a more diverse and inclusive school climate for students in their school building. Others illustrated that listening to personal LGBT stories increased their awareness and knowledge, especially for participants with limited hands-on experience with the LGBT student population. One team, in particular, used personal LGBT stories to engage and change the mindsets of students and staff.

***Personal Stories.*** It was clear that the personal stories, whether from within each team or from their own outside network, had a positive influence on the team members interviewed. In particular, three team members openly told stories of being a member of the LGBT community. This included LGBT personal experiences with educational (i.e., bullying, discrimination, training, resources) as well as childhood memories (i.e. support, resilience). These messages were meaningful and influential to the storyteller and also to the listener. Hearing these personal growth experiences provided meaning and inspiration to the non-LGBT team members. These participants expressed an increase of respect, awareness, mentorship (Team 2), and empathy (“perspective of the other”) not only towards their counterpart, but also in their advocacy work with LGBT youth. Two teams in particular discussed the impact of hearing other marginalized stories (i.e., Judaism, gay teacher outside of team) as positive. They believed that hearing these experiences provided insights to how they do not want to be treated as well as inspired them to create more affirming and comforting spaces for LGBT youth groups.

***Alliance Building.*** The experience of hearing these stories was also expressed as a beneficial strategy to develop a stronger and meaningful alliance. For example, Team 1 felt that sharing stories and experiences that were deeply personal (i.e., Genna’s story) with one another

built intimacy and strengthened their school counselor-administrator relationship. Likewise, for Jen (Team 2), hearing Tony's firsthand experiences and memories as a gay man bolstered respect towards her colleague, helped to create a more trustworthy alliance, as well as provided a mentorship experience for her. This finding suggests the importance of establishing a network of support (Paisley & McMahon, 2001) such as learning from and being mentored by individuals (Field & Baker, 2004) who have expertise and/or firsthand experience with the LGBT community. These findings also align with the College Board (2009a) national survey, which proposed the importance to having a safe and respectful space where both school counselor and administrator values and opinions are welcomed and supported.

*Learning from Others.* It is possible that personal and professional life experiences, experienced personally or shared from members of the LGBT community, may help to raise consciousness about social justice concerns, foster empathy, and enhance learning about LGBT topics. This phenomenon was unable to be located in the school counseling and administrator scholarship from an LGBT perspective; however, a few authors suggest that the use of personal LGBT stories can be an important tool to prepare teachers (Athanases & Larrabee, 2002; Meyer, 2009) and college students (Geller, 1991; Nelson & Krieger, 1997) for work with LGBT students. Meyer (2009) reported that teachers' personal, childhood, and professional experiences with bullying and discrimination, as a minority school community member (i.e., LGBT), influenced how they intervene to bullying situations.

Scholarship not pertaining to LGBT issues highlights the importance of personal experiences (i.e., storytelling) for enhancing empathy, learning about self, as well as understanding other cultures in teaching and teacher education programs (Luwisch, 2001; Gomez, Walker, & Page, 2000). For example, Athanases and Larrabee (2002) found that

exposure to experiences with lesbian and gay (LG) guest speakers and LG authored papers (Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014) were beneficial in helping prospective teachers develop an advocacy plan for this marginalized student population. With respect to school counselors and social justice work, McMahan and authors (2010) found that personal and childhood exposure to injustices and culture backgrounds were influential experiences for school counselors in their work for and with marginalized youth.

Literature also cites the importance of personal storytelling in counselor education (Myers, Tollerud, & Jeon, 2012), narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990), as well as marriage and family counseling (Cheon & Murphy, 2007). According to Myers and colleagues (2012), storytelling can offer “learners vicarious learning experiences when direct experiences are not possible” (p. 2). Cheon and Murphy (2007) suggest that the use of self in marriage and family therapy can enhance meaning with clients as well as foster self-awareness and self-knowledge. Counseling literature also recommends that storytelling can encourage affective growth such as the development of empathy towards other cultures (Myers, Tollerud, & Jeon, 2012). Furthermore, storytelling can foster self-reflection, perspective taking (Binks, Smith, Smith, & Joshi, 2009) as well as strengthen the alliance between students and instructor (Pfahl, 2007).

**Theme 2: Leading by Example.** All teams expressed meaning in their roles as leaders, advocates, and role models for LGBT students. Organic in each teams’ experience was a shared vision and commitment towards being a risk taker and role model for and with their LGBT student population. Several teams took specific actions to show respect and care about LGBT initiatives; whereas, some engaged in personal risk taking and shared experiences and histories about oneself as a member of the LGBT community. In essence, their work as collaborative

advocates revealed the various ways in which the teams modeled authenticity and visibility in their partnerships as well as throughout their school communities.

***Risk Taking.*** For a few team members, meaning was constructed through their willingness to be open and authentic about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity with each other as well as with other stakeholders (i.e., students, faculty, parents). Other team members lead by example through visual representation for the LGBT youth community (i.e., safe space icons, rainbow lanyards, presence, etc.) throughout their school buildings. During the first round of interviews, participants who self-identified as LGBT (Genna, Tony, and LR) shared their personal narratives of being out at school and the various ways they found meaning in their journey. Over and over, ongoing self-examination related to their identity, establishing their professional role and function, as well as knowing their school culture and community were salient experiences that emerged from the data. They uniformly expressed that their journey as LGBT role models was a personal and ongoing process and it became clear that Teams 1-3 each had a set of experiences that were different.

Team members also expressed meaning through support from their counterpart[s] (i.e., feeling safe to come out, establishing inclusive policies and procedures) as well as knowing that building/district administration (i.e., school board, superintendent, trainings, etc.) had their backs. Although no research could be located that addressed school counselors'/administrators' use of support with each other regarding LGBT identity (i.e., coming out to each other), connections can be drawn to scholarship on social justice development. For example, authors have spoken to the importance of self-reflection and risk-taking (Bemak & Chung, 2008), knowing self as an advocate (Bemak & Chung, 2008; McMahon et al., 2010), as well as the use

of self (personhood) as an imperative strategy for change in school settings (Kim, 2006; McMahon et al., 2010).

***Role Induction.*** Although no team member experienced resistance from their counterpart for being open about their identity, LR spoke in great length to the importance of establishing her role and function as a school counselor first. She found that having educational stakeholders (i.e., board members, parents, town mayor, etc.) understand her duties and the contribution that she provides to the success for all students (“good for all students”) was critical when deciding to share more about her sexual identity with others. Other teams discussed the importance of defining their roles, which will be discussed more in depth in the following theme. LRs’ use of role and function as a school counselor in her personal journey (i.e., LGBT role modeling) connects to prior research that emphasizes the importance of school counselor role clarification with administration (College Board, 2009b; Dollerhide et al., 2007; Odegard-Koester & Watkins, 2016; Ponc & Brock, 2000) as well as with Beck’s (2016) suggestion for school counselors to consider introducing their primary role first before facilitating LGBT dialogue with their administrator.

***Educating Others.*** Teams also reported meaning from their collaborative vision as role models for LGBT youth outside of the school building. The teams provided several examples and experiences (i.e., partnering with neighboring districts, speaking at state and national conferences) regarding how extending their work and expertise outside of the school building was an integral approach in their work for and with LGBT students. Advocating for LGBT youth at the public arena level (i.e., conference presentations) is well established in the school counseling literature (Beck et al., 2014; Goodrich et al., 2013; Ratts et al., 2007). In addition, three teams prescribed meaning to the LGBT award activities (i.e., Educator of the Year) they

attended either by themselves or with their counterpart as an influential experience and realization to educate others.

**Theme 3: Intentional Partnering.** What are the lived experiences of school counselors and administrators who make concerted efforts to improve the educational environment for LGBT students? This theme focused on intentional collaboration between school counselors and administrators for LGBT youth advocacy. Each team emphasized collaboration, but with the expressed purpose of partnering in initiatives connected with creating programs and services that benefit all students, including LGBT youth.

*Reflecting on Strengths and Limitations.* Teams expressed the importance of self-reflection as a critical starting point in their alliance building and communicative process. Some teams reflected upon their advocacy strengths, limitations, and professional roles with LGBT youth, whereas others referred to prior negative experiences (Team 2) as reasons to partner with their counterpart. Team members felt that identifying their professional specializations (i.e., expertise with LGBT issues, value structures, etc.) as well as limitations strengthened their engagement in programs and services that benefited LGBT youth. In particular, Team 3 talked about knowing and understanding their current level of self-efficacy, while others spoke about knowing when to step back and let their counterpart take over (Team 2). They believed this allowed them to utilize “each other’s strengths” in challenging situations and develop “good yin and yang” within their team. Engaging in intentional work (i.e., school counselors, administrators, etc.) that benefits marginalized youth as well as strengthens school improvement goals closely connects with education initiatives/standards such as the ASCA National Model (2012), the Transforming School Counseling Initiative, as well as with recommendations found within the literature (Singh et al., 2010; Janson, Milltello, & Kosine, 2008).

***Support Network.*** Another subtheme that emerged was the desire for mutual support within each teams' relationship. Team members described their counterpart as a friend, colleague, and/or mentor. A few teams placed value on having personal and professional support in their relationship-building process for LGBT students. Having a supportive network with each other seemed to be critical when teams in this study addressed the needs of LGBT youth in their buildings, whether proactive or reactive. A few teams articulated the importance of knowing each other's role and function on a professional level (i.e., comprehensive school counseling, data-driven practices, etc.); whereas all teams felt that knowing each other beyond their professional roles was salient. Having a safe space to bounce professional ideas with one another as well as cry and release stress strengthened the level of trust and respect between the team members.

***Shared Vision.*** From these intentional conversations and gatherings, team members were also able to learn more about their counterpart's philosophy and vision towards social justice and LGBT youth. Most teams described a strong philosophical belief system that supported their work and ultimately deepened their shared commitment and vision to address the unique needs of LGBT students with their counterpart. Teams also expressed similar views and attitudes towards supporting transgender students and addressing school safety concerns. Whether connecting on a personal or professional level, each team valued open, authentic, and regular communication. According to the team members, purposeful communication offered an opportunity to strengthen their work for social justice issues. This finding aligns with recommendations established in the literature regarding how school counselors should intentionally find opportunities to communicate, share ideas, as well as continue to educate stakeholders about their role and function (College Board, 2009a; Ponc & Brock, 2000).

***Purposeful Collaboration.*** Two teams, in particular, shared that their collaborative efforts were purposeful even before they knew each other. Teams 2 and 3 deliberately searched for a partner who shared similar beliefs towards social justice issues during their hiring practices. LR (Team 3) expressed her reasons to find a school district and administrator that would support her professionally and personally as a gay woman. Likewise, Tony (Team 2) was intentional in his hiring practices; however, his motivation emerged from a negative experience with his former school counselor. It became very clear that teams became intentional in their advocacy efforts for LGBT youth, regardless of how many years they had worked with one another. The results provide insight into how these teams established a purposeful coalition of support for LGBT youth early in their relationships and for some even during the hiring process. For these teams, communication and support appeared to be salient regardless if they had worked together for as little as 2 years as a team (Team 2) to over 20 years of collaborative experience (Team 4).

**Theme 4: Moving Beyond Turf Wars.** Teams in this study also expressed their viewpoints on leadership. A clear pattern in this study and throughout this theme was how each team engaged in a collaborative approach to incorporate LGBT initiatives in their schools. Whether they collaborated on student discipline issues, supported transgender students, or shared ideas, all teams appreciated and welcomed their counterparts' perspective.

***Shared Decision-Making.*** Most team members felt that shared decision-making on school initiatives had a positive impact not only on their relationship, but enhanced their work for and with LGBT youth. They supported and backed each other up when challenges and/or resistance surfaced in their LGBT youth advocacy, thus avoiding turf wars. A few teams noted a shared vision and approach when addressing students who oppose learning about LGBT topics while at school. For example, two teams expressed a strong foundation and shared value to view

student mistakes as an opportunity to teach. To support this perspective, several administrators held a professional belief and understood that they were not the sole leader in their buildings (NPBEA, 2015). They expressed meaning and value to combining their skill sets with other leaders, which often included school counselors. The administrators' use of shared leadership practices connects to guidelines established for the training and practice of educational administrators and specifically aligns with the PSEL Standard 6 (NPBEA, 2015).

Because they established a safe and trustworthy alliance, several teams felt supported to broach difficult conversations and even go “toe to toe” with each other. One administrator, in particular, shared her experience of having to pull back her school counselor on a specific LGBT-district initiative. Other team members described their autonomy and comfort to speak up and give voice to school wide initiatives that positively influenced the lives of LGBT youth. Flexibility, timing, and finding compromise were all expressed as important factors for the teams, but were experienced differently within each school system.

**Theme 5: Pushing the System.** The teams in this study all prescribed meaning of their work to speak out against injustices and create a more diverse and vibrant school community for LGBT students. Each team had a unique set of experiences regarding how they pushed and advocated for equality across multiple levels. For some of the teams, meaning was constructed at the student advocacy level. Team members focused on LGBT youth empowerment through giving voice to their student experiences (i.e., forming GSA's, ensuring inclusive representation in curriculum, etc.). Teams also highlighted the significance of teaching LGBT youth critical self-advocacy tools as well as using their unique experiences to inform and educate others.

**Strategic Advocacy.** Teams revealed the ways in which they advocated for LGBT youth at the school/community level. All team members emphasized the need to join forces and

strengthen ally support with teachers and staff. However, teams discussed variations in the meaning-making process when working with stakeholders (i.e., faculty, staff, parents, etc.). Some saw the need to challenge and confront harmful values and biases of personnel who worked in their school; whereas, others felt they needed to push their school system through formal adoption of inclusive policies and procedures. The literature highlights the importance for school counselors to advocate for marginalized students as well as engage other stakeholders in this work across multiple levels (Lewis et al., 2003; Ratts et al., 2007). Regardless of the approach utilized, all teams expressed the significance of having a strategic plan to get there.

Each team offered a different story regarding their meticulous and strategic work for LGBT students. Some reported the importance of knowing their school culture and climate as an instrumental place to start. Others valued using a proactive approach by giving school tours and educating future students on the LGBT practices in the school building. For Team 1, in particular, being proactive meant ensuring that small problems “won’t become big issues.” Although no team experienced heightened levels of resistance and/or direction to stop their inclusive efforts, all shared that this work takes time and patience. Team 3 spoke at length about the various systems involved in a school system as well as the interactions between these systems when creating change for their students. The importance of strategic planning found in this study is consistent with findings from Singh and colleagues (2010) as well as with advocacy frameworks and models such as the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis et al., 2003; Ratts et al., 2007).

***Future Work.*** Lastly, teams reflected upon their journeys and told stories about the work that remains ahead for themselves as well as their districts and profession. Maintaining a positive attitude despite any potential adversity (i.e., student push back, transgender bathroom bills, etc.)

was expressed as salient for the teams in their future work and roles. In particular, some teams expressed the need to forge ahead and locate new programs and mentorship opportunities for their LGBT youth. One team expressed the need to engage in interdisciplinary work between school counselors and administrators at the macro level. However, maintaining balance to ensure that their work connects back to their students and buildings was a consistent message among several teams.

Based on these findings, best practices for school counselor-administrator teams in developing school reform efforts for LGBT youth are outlined below as well as in the following section. These include:

1. Build a supportive and effective working relationship
2. Establish a clear understanding of each other's role and function early
3. Develop a collective vision towards equity and inclusion
4. Reflect upon and assess strengths, limitations, and skills for effective LGBT youth advocacy
5. Learn firsthand from LGBT stories and experiences
6. Value input, broach difficult conversations, and find compromise
7. Advocate intentionally and strategically for LGBT youth
8. Share responsibility for the development of LGBT-inclusive practices and policies
9. Incorporate LGBT youth experiences into school-wide activities and professional staff trainings
10. Examine school climate and establish policies for LGBT youth at the micro and macro levels

## **Implications for Practice, Training, and Future Research**

The themes and subthemes that emerged from the study provide several implications for practice, training, and research. The following section will outline implications for administrators, school counselors, school counselor-administrator teams, training programs, and researchers.

**Administrators.** All teams in this study expressed the importance to having a member of the LGBT community within their team or as a member of their school staff. Hearing the personal stories and experiences from the LGBT individuals provided knowledge and understanding to the team members. This finding suggests that administrators can engage in strategies to provide a safe and affirming environment to LGBT staff, faculty, and allies (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008; Goodrich et al., 2013). Creating inclusive workplaces (NPBEA, 2015) and developing resources to help LGBT staff and faculty feel safe and visible can be important considerations for administrators. Implementing and enforcing anti-harassment policies and practices for LGBT youth and faculty can be an important strategy for administrators to show respect and loyalty towards the LGBT community (Goodrich et al., 2013; Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014). Administrators should routinely model and expect faculty and staff to follow policies that protect LGBT students (i.e., names and pronouns, dress code). Administrators can also work systemically with superintendents and school boards to help educate and establish LGBT-inclusive procedures district-wide. Examples may include a review and modification of school handbooks and vision/mission statements as well as providing access to gender-neutral facilities and activities in all school buildings. These recommendations may help to create a space where LGBT staff and faculty members feel more safe and supported to share their lived experiences.

Given the significance of joint responsibility and shared decision-making on LGBT initiatives between teams in this study, administrators should be intentional and invite school counselors as well as key stakeholders (i.e., teachers, parents, LGBT students) on school leadership teams. This recommendation is consistent with Standard 7 of the PSEL Standards (NPBEA, 2015). Administrators can also be deliberate when developing professional activities and invite LGBT role models from their local communities and also within their school districts (i.e., youth) to share and educate all school stakeholders on LGBT issues (Athanasas & Larrabee, 2002). These connections with youth organizations could also serve as an invaluable resource and mentorship opportunity for LGBT youth as well as when working with their families (NPBEA, 2015; Singh & Burnes, 2009; Snapp et al., 2015b).

A few administrators in this study highlighted the need to increase diversity in their teaching and educational staff. Administrators should be mindful of the ways they can leverage partnerships with local and state organizations (i.e., cultural centers, faith-based groups, local chambers) as well as with universities to improve inclusive hiring practices (O'Malley & Capper, 2015). Administrators may consider using the PSEL Standards outlined by NPBEA (2015) to help cultivate cultural values and practices within their hiring process. These efforts may help to facilitate growth towards a more culturally diverse setting as well as increase the presence of diverse role models, which was integral to the team experiences' in this study.

Team members also called upon administrator organizations to increase professional development opportunities (GLSEN & Harris, 2008), including break out sessions at conferences on LGBT topics. Therefore, administrators can join conference planning committees and collaborate/invite educators who are active with LGBT-initiatives in their buildings as well as with neighboring districts to share and present their practices. This type of partnership could help

to promote interdisciplinary work, strengthen best practices on LGBT initiatives, and provide professional development to other administrators at the macro level (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008; Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014).

**School Counselors.** To help support administrators in their work to bolster diversity and inclusion, school counselors can provide support and knowledge to their building and district leaders (ASCA, 2012). Because several school counselors highlighted the importance of reflexivity as well as knowing your school culture in this study, it is recommended that school counselors engage in self-awareness activities (Chen-Hayes & Getch, 2015). Practicing school counselors may benefit from assessing their skills in speaking out on behalf of LGBT youth as well as their level of comfort in engaging in these types of conversations with their building administrator (Beck et al., 2014; Dahir & Stone, 2012).

Several school counselors in this study were champions in communicating their role and function as advocates with their administrator (ASCA, 2012). For a few teams, this began in the hiring process. School counselors can also help their administrators understand the role and function of social-justice oriented school counseling as outlined in the ASCA National Model (2012) and the ACA advocacy competencies (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Lewis, et al., 2003; Ratts et al., 2007). School counselors should also showcase to their administrator the value they add to the entire school community (Erford, 2015), which may originate in the hiring process and continually evolve throughout the lifespan of the counselor-administrator relationship. In efforts to strengthen a philosophical match and agreement on school initiatives, school counselors are also encouraged to connect their advocacy efforts for LGBT youth to the overall school/district mission and vision (ASCA, 2012, 2016a; Goodrich & Luke, 2009).

Building an effective working relationship with their administrator was invaluable to each team's work for and with LGBT students in this study. In addition, developing a collective vision towards equity and inclusion was also expressed as beneficial for the team members (College Board, 2009b). These findings may provide important insights to the work of practicing school counselors and how they develop and navigate the relationship-building process with their administrator (Chen-Hayes & Getch, 2015; Dollarhide et al., 2007; Goodrich & Luke, 2009). Developing mutual trust, respect, and support with regard to each other's role and duties can be important considerations for school counselors as suggested by several scholars (College Board, 2009a; Ponec & Brock, 2000). To move in this direction, school counselors are encouraged to draw upon their clinical training with respect to building a trustworthy counselor-client relationship. School counselors can adapt, model, and bring forward several relationship factors (i.e., microskills) when communicating with administrators (Goodrich et al, 2013). Examples may include: empathy, unconditional positive regard, patience/flexibility, confidentiality, and awareness to biases. Establishing mutual goals should also be familiar to school counselors (ASCA, 2012). Thus, school counselors are also encouraged to find common values and objectives (i.e., social justice, student discipline, school climate) with their administrators (Beck, 2016; Goodrich & Luke, 2009).

School counselors can also demonstrate knowledge and expertise about LGBT programs as well as strategically communicate ways to improve the academic, personal/social, and college/career outcomes for LGBT youth with administrators (ASCA, 2016a). School counselors may need to share information with their administrator regarding the current barriers and needs of their LGBT student population as suggested by Goodrich and Luke (2009) and Singh and Burnes (2009). In particular, one team in this study utilized data-driven practices to help make

collaborative decisions. Familiarity with the ASCA National Model (2012) and incorporating school climate topics and questions for LGBT youth can also be important considerations for school counselors, which align with recommendations set forth by Goodrich and Luke (2009). Furthermore, school counselors may consider disaggregating data on LGBT youths' strengths and barriers and then share with their administrator (Beck et al., 2014). Because timing was expressed as important to a few school counselors in this study, school counselors should be mindful and respectful to the time in which they meet with their administrator. Having a concise message ready to go may also benefit school counselors in this area (ASCA, 2012).

At the district level, school counselors can also help administrators develop LGBT-inclusive questions to ask potential employees during the interview process as suggested by Goodrich and colleagues (2013). In addition, school counselors should understand public and school board policies, which may benefit their advocacy when talking to stakeholders about ways to develop enumerated policies that include protections for LGBT students (ASCA, 2016a). When intervening at the macro level, school counselors may want to consult with colleagues and/or practice with mentors. These connections may help to increase self-efficacy and comfort when presenting to board members and individuals outside of the school building (Beck et al., 2014).

**School Counselor-Administrator Teams.** This study also offers implications for how school counselor-administrator teams can develop a more effective and close working alliance with respect to LGBT youth. Which recommendations teams select may depend upon several components such as school culture, student enrollment, availability/time, as well as relationship status (College Board, 2011). In addition, reflection and self-assessment may help teams get

started by determining a beginning place in their shared advocacy work on behalf of LGBT youth (Beck, 2016; College Board, 2011).

In this study, the professional teams emphasized the importance of developing a safe environment in which all members could take risks and be able to share personal and professional stories in an open and authentic manner. In particular, all teams reported that sharing and connecting on a personal level had an impactful influence on their relationship. The school counselor-administrator teams functioned like friends and almost like family. Drawing on these experiences, teams are encouraged to assess their level of support from the perspective of both administrator and school counselor (Beck, 2016; College Board, 2011). For example, teams could adapt the wellness checks as described by Team 3, where members check-in with each other frequently throughout the school day. In efforts to increase open and honest communication, school counselor-administrator teams should schedule regular meetings and discuss critical barriers that impact student outcomes from a social justice perspective, including LGBT students (College Board, 2011; Ponec & Brock, 2000). Furthermore, teams may benefit from a taking a few minutes to check-in with each other personally (NPBEA, 2015), as suggested by a few team members in this study.

Teams in this study also communicated the importance of learning firsthand from LGBT stories and experience. Through effective and ongoing communication, team members may feel more inclined to share, invite, and listen to diverse and life experiences of their counterpart and/or stories from LGBT individuals outside of the partnership. Empathizing with the needs of others may help to strengthen mutual trust and respect within the team as well as develop a shared commitment to address the unique needs of LGBT youth.

Teams also believed that taking risks and being role models for LGBT students was important and helped to push their school systems towards equality. Thus, practicing school counselor-administrator teams may strengthen their work on behalf of LGBT youth through active and visible role modeling for LGBT youth (Singh & Burnes, 2009). Examples may include: form a GSA club, participate in inclusive activities (i.e., Day of Silence, Ally Week.), advocate for student and faculty dress codes that are inclusive to all identities, and share best practices and policy recommendations with the school board, neighboring districts, and professional organizations (ASCA, 2016a; Goodrich et al., 2013; Singh & Burnes, 2009). In addition, presenting together and sharing LGBT successes at local and state school counselor and educational leadership conferences is another way to broaden the shared advocacy for team members as suggested by Beck (2016). Another recommendation for school counselor-administrator teams involves incorporating LGBT youth experiences. Including LGBT youth stories during professional meetings with educators and/or co-presenting with youth at the aforementioned conferences may also help to bolster the shared advocacy efforts of school counselors and administrators.

Teams should also have a clear understanding of what each member's role brings to the table (College Board, 2011; Militello & Janson, 2007) with respect to LGBT youth. Team members should continually monitor and assess their strengths, limitations, and skills that compliment their shared work on behalf of LGBT youth (College Board, 2011). This type of collaboration may help to develop a team-wide vision of success and bolster shared decision-making from both school counselors and administrators. As far as collaborative action, teams in the study would often partner when addressing student/parent resistance to LGBT initiatives as well as the development of school-wide diverse initiatives. The administrator's inclusion of the

school counselor on leadership decisions (i.e., school climate, safety, etc.) served as an important part of the team's advocacy on behalf of LGBT students (NPBEA, 2015). Therefore, school counselor-administrator teams should not only pair up, but also value input from one another and from other stakeholders as well (Beck, 2016). Finding compromise when difficult conversations emerge may also be helpful for teams when making shared decisions that impact the success for LGBT youth.

**Training programs.** Training programs can also make concerted efforts to bolster the knowledge, skills, and awareness of LGBT topics with students. Several teams in this study voiced that they did not get the requisite training to collaboratively work with each other as well as learn how to advocate on behalf of LGBT students during their training programs. As such, the training environment can provide a safe and critical space for trainees to be informed about LGBT best practices, learn firsthand from personal LGBT stories, as well as strengthen interdisciplinary collaborations (Beck, 2016; Farmer et al., 2013; Marshall & Hernandez, 2012). In this study, one of the most influential strategies of educating individuals about the unique needs of LGBT youth involved learning from individual stories.

School counseling and educational administrator programs are encouraged to introduce students to and learn from LGBT-identified individuals and their experiences. Specifically, both programs can use a variety of creative and authentic approaches, including readings that incorporate the experiences of LGBT authors (Athanases & Larrabee, 2002; Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014) as well as invite guest speakers/panels and show videos that showcase LGBT youth experiences. To help recruit these invaluable experiences, faculty members from both programs can collaborate with one another. For example, programs are encouraged to partner with LGBT organizations on campus and within their community as a unique way to identify

individuals who would be willing and comfortable to share their lived experiences with future educators (Beck, 2016; Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014). It is also imperative that faculty members provide a safe, respectful, and culturally sensitive learning environment (Marshall & Harnandez, 2012; O'Malley & Capper, 2015). This may help diverse trainees feel safe and supported to share their lived experiences with class members as well.

School counseling and educational administrator programs can also forge a strong alliance in their work to prepare both professionals for work with each other and as collaborative partners for LGBT youth. Both departments should consider guest lecturing, team teaching, and/or teaching co-curricular classes. For example, faculty may consider substituting for each other and deliberately educating students about their respective role and as an advocate for LGBT students. Both programs would do well to introduce and establish role and function of both the administrator and school counselor early in programs (Armstrong et al., 2010; ASCA, 2012; Dahir et al., 2010; Williams & Wehrman, 2010).

Faculty members are also encouraged to help school counselor and administrator trainees' form professional relationships early (Armstrong et al., 2010; College Board, 2011). Deliberate efforts to combine classes and practice relationship-building skills may help students better understand their strengths and limitations as advocates. These opportunities may also help students learn how to support each other and how to best utilize their future roles to support LGBT youth. Practice with role-playing and using skills to increase confidence when engaging in constructive conversations on social justice topics may also benefit students (O'Malley & Capper, 2015). Interdisciplinary class meetings could also focus on teaching data collection practices (i.e., equity gaps, school improvement goals, etc.), learning about the ASCA National Model (2012), as well as developing a shared message to future school board members regarding

the change needed for LGBT students (Beck, 2016; Goodrich et al., 2013; Goodrich & Luke, 2009). Further, as team members in this study expressed the significance of knowing your school culture and system, preparation programs should also support students through teaching political savvy skills (Singh et al., 2010). Teaching how to market themselves as well as discussing when and how to advocate in the context of various school settings (i.e., rural/small town, suburban, urban) may also benefit trainees (Bemak & Chung, 2008).

Because the team members in this study discussed the importance of role modeling and developing a shared vision and commitment, faculty members can develop specific interdisciplinary activities to maximize support to the LGBT community on campus. Campus wide cultural and diversity events (i.e., Safe Zone Training, Day of Silence, National Coming Out Day) can be additional ways for both programs to partner and engage in collaborative work on behalf of LGBT students (Beck, 2016). It is also recommended for graduate preparation programs to help students learn from real world experiences and exemplary examples at conferences and from local schools. Inviting school counselor-administrator teams to guest lecture on their experiences for and with LGBT youth may also help to bolster preparedness and motivation. Future school counselors and administrators could also benefit from getting into PreK-12 classrooms early and learn from current practitioners how to be purposeful and strategic as advocates for and with LGBT youth (O'Malley & Capper, 2015).

Counselor educators and educational leadership faculty can also examine their pedagogy, program beliefs, and teaching philosophies from an LGBT perspective as suggested by O'Malley and Capper (2015). This may help faculty members to reflect and identify ways to increase LGBT-inclusive topics throughout their training programs. At the school district level, it is important for faculty to have future school counselors and administrators work with school

boards, superintendents, and policy makers to strengthen support for inclusive schools. For example, faculty can have students review school handbooks and make recommendations that advocate for harassment and discrimination policies that include specific protections for LGBT youth. At the macro level, becoming involved and forming connections with LGBT-focused local, state, and national organizations may serve as an important guide and resource for future school counselors and administrators (O'Malley & Capper, 2015). Training programs are also encouraged to examine their screening practices and begin to identify ways to strengthen diversity representation of all races, cultures, and backgrounds (O'Malley & Capper, 2015).

**Future research.** This study contributes to the literature in its focus on the experiences of school counselor-administrator teams and LGBT youth. Three participants openly identified as LGBT and shared throughout the interview process that coming out to school stakeholders (i.e., administrator, students, parents, etc.) was a personal and ongoing process. Although these participants cited the value and importance in being authentic to themselves as well as with stakeholders, deciding when to share their personal identity was expressed differently. In particular, several team members discussed the importance of using self (i.e., personhood, personal stories and histories) as a strategy for change within their relationship as well as with other stakeholders. However, no studies could be located that specifically explore how school counselors incorporate their personhood into their advocacy work, whether from an LGBT perspective or not (McMahan et al., 2010). Additional studies are necessary to build upon this inquiry in efforts to develop an LGBT advocacy identity development model for school counselors as well as for administrators and school counselor-administrator teams. Furthermore, limited research exists that addresses school counselors' and administrators' process in their journey as being openly LGBT in the education setting. A grounded theory methodology that

explores the strategies and personal process of LGBT school counselors and administrators may be beneficial for the field of counseling and education.

Since this study utilized a best practice approach and recruited exemplary teams, it is suggested that future research explores this phenomenon of inquiry (i.e., school counselor-administrator teams and LGBT youth) from a non-exemplary approach. Future studies could include a larger sample size. For example, a quantitative survey could ask both administrators and school counselors to determine the most important aspects of an effective relationship when working for and with LGBT youth. In addition, exploring this phenomenon within elementary and rural settings as well as with superintendents and school counseling interns may offer additional insights to this inquiry. Quantitative studies that explore the effects of interventions (i.e., safe space training, inclusive curriculum,) targeted to educate school counselors and administrators regarding LGBT youth advocacy are needed. In addition, qualitative studies that examine the experiences of future school counselors and administrators exposed to LGBT curriculums and trainings before they begin work in their field may also be beneficial for school counseling and educational leadership training programs. The importance of having research that demonstrates the educational value of effective school counselor-administrator partnerships is vital; yet several studies found in the literature are outdated. It is recommended that scholars increase research that captures the unique experience regarding how school counselors and administrators partner to strengthen educational reform efforts and enhance the academic successes for all students.

## **Conclusions**

Chapter V offered a discussion of the five major themes associated with the exploration of the experiences between school counselors and administrators regarding their work for LGBT

students. The purpose of this study was to contribute to the empirical literature on school counselor-administrator relationships with respect to developing a safe and inclusive school environment for LGBT students. The themes of this study showcased several stories and examples for how these dedicated teams developed a meaningful and intentional partnership for creating a safe and inclusive school climate with LGBT students. The results indicated that learning firsthand from personal experience and true stories of LGBT individuals, whether within the relationship or from an outside network, was a meaningful and rich experience for the teams. Teams in this study were able to align their vision, expertise, and roles towards effective LGBT youth advocacy and integrate purpose in their collaborative actions for change.

The importance for school counselors and administrators to increase their knowledge and learn from the unique perspectives of LGBT individuals was suggested based upon these research findings. Strategies to develop a supportive, intentional, and close working alliance was also recommended for school counselor-administrator teams and training programs. Additionally, joint participation in the development of LGBT-welcoming initiatives at the micro and macro levels may also be useful for school counselor-administrator teams.

Research that addresses the relationship experiences between school counselors and administrators to work with LGBT students is scarce. This researcher hopes that these results inspire scholars to examine this inquiry further as well as provide school counselors and principals with stories and practical examples with respect to LGBT youth advocacy from exemplary and dedicated professionals. As shared in Chapter IV, Genna offered a meaningful perspective and inspirational message for educators to engage in this important work. She voiced: “And it doesn’t always have to be somebody of same or someone’s who’s rich (...) it just takes one individual who (...) is able to start something and bring it to the forefront.”

## APPENDIX A

### MYSELF AS A HUMAN INSTRUMENT

It is important for qualitative investigators to discuss their experiences, attitudes, and potential biases related to the research being conducted (Hunt, 2011; Merriam, 2009). My research interest in this study comes from my own personal experience as a gay man and professional experience as a school counselor for six years. Nonetheless, these events have shaped my beliefs as well as strengthened my research agenda regarding the need to improve the educational experiences for LGBT youth. Specifically, my program of research examines the following: (a) the experiences and the development of school counselors as advocates; (b) the perspectives and reflections on the process of school counselor advocacy with regard to LGBT issues; and (c) and the role of relationship of school counselors and administrators who develop a safe and inclusive school environment for LGBT students.

These research strands have been influenced from my journey as a gay man. Attending a school system with limited resources to support my sexual identity development has provided me with insights regarding the importance of LGBT-related supports and services. Further, growing up in a rural community provided me with limited opportunities to observe and interact with role models that identified as LGBT. My identity as a gay man has also been influenced upon educational climates that I have worked in.

When I was hired as the school counselor in a rural Midwestern school district in 2008, I was unaware of deeply rooted opposition towards the LGBT community. In early 2012, my role was called upon from administrators to combat an increasing concern of elementary students using derogatory language, such as “that’s so gay” (Beck, 2017; Beck et al., 2014). During this time, my intervention involved the use of an anti-bullying curriculum from The Gay, Lesbian

and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and a children's story regarding family diversity. Despite my advocacy to support all students and families, things changed when a small group of parent's voiced opposition. This ultimately resulted in the school board directing me to remove any LGBT-related supports from my counseling office.

I was conflicted and confused regarding how to handle this ethical dilemma. This was a defining moment for me; where my passion and commitment to school counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students was strengthened. Observing the positive impact that the inclusive programming had on students and the larger school climate, I continued on the path to do what was right for all of my students; even when all seemed impossible. While my advocacy continued to strengthen, my relationships and interactions with school personnel suffered.

During this time, I began to notice how conflicted my building administrator was in deciding whether or not support my inclusive advocacy efforts. Although we had a strong and supportive relationship, we endured ruptures in our partnership. Witnessing the school leaders and board members ignore their responsibility to support LGBT students required me to extend my advocacy efforts beyond the walls of my school counseling office and to partner with national educational organizations. Specifically, I advocated with state and national groups such as The Illinois Safe Schools Alliance and GLSEN, which resulted in national debate on CNN and other media sources. For several months, there was debate between both sides of this incident. The school board never lifted the ban on the use of LGBT inclusive materials; however, I presently look back upon this experience and know that the "seeds for respect" were planted. In 2013, I was awarded with national recognition as the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educator of the Year for my relentless advocacy to create a positive status quo for LGBT students within this school district.

After submitting my letter of resignation in 2013 and in my present role as doctoral candidate, I continue to engage in self-reflection in regards to critical incident, my strengths, and areas of weaknesses as an advocate for LGBT youth. More specifically, I reflect upon the challenges and adversity that other school counselors may encounter as advocates for LGBT. I have also thought about how difficult it might have been for my administrator to support programming for LGBT students while being directed to support the policies outlined by the board of education. As I have reviewed the literature on the phenomenon of advocacy from both a school counselor and administrator lens, there is a clear lacking of scholarship regarding how to prepare school counselor-administrator teams in effective LGBT youth advocacy, especially within organizational structures that are not ready to tackle inclusive programming. I have also noticed that there are an abundance of school systems that do still do not support LGBT programming and deny students opportunities to thrive. These preliminary questions led me to this study.

## APPENDIX B

### RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear:

My name is Matthew Beck and I am doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at The University of Iowa. I am contacting you today because you, your school, and/or your school counselor counselor/administrator counterpart have received recognition for making schools safer and more inclusive for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students.

I invite you to take part in a study that focuses on the relationship experiences of school counselors and administrators who make concerted efforts to improve the educational environment for LGBT students. There are multiple levels to this study and you may choose to participate in one or more of the activities. These activities include:

- A 30- minute preliminary individual interview with the researcher. This interview will consist of questions about examples of your work on behalf of LGBT students as well as the working relationship with your administrator/school counselor counterpart with respect to providing a safe and inclusive environment for LGBT students at your school.
- A 60-minute joint interview with your school counselor/administrator counterpart. This interview will consist of questions about relationship experiences and leadership practices in your collaborative work on behalf of LGBT students.
- A 30-minute follow-up individual interview to help enhance my understanding of your experience and verify accuracy of the data you have provided.

The interviews will be facilitated via phone and/or in-person. The total time commitment for your participation in this study will be 2-3 hours over a two-month period. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may stop participating at any time. The interviews will be audio recorded. However, confidentiality will be maintained throughout and all digital files will be stored on a password-protected file on the researcher's password-protected laptop. You will also be provided an opportunity to review a transcript of your individual and joint interview. If interested and would like more information, please feel free to contact me Matthew Beck at (563)-340-7376 or via email at [matthew-beck@uiowa.edu](mailto:matthew-beck@uiowa.edu)

If you are certain of your interest and agree to participate, you are also welcome to follow this link [https://uiowa.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_3zaVArLivcbJq29](https://uiowa.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3zaVArLivcbJq29) to provide demographic and contact information. Once I receive your information, I will contact you in regard to scheduling an interview time.

If you have any questions, please contact me for clarification. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Matthew Beck  
Doctoral Candidate-Counselor Education and Supervision  
The University of Iowa

## APPENDIX C

### PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1. Preferred pseudonym for interview transcripts
2. 

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Preferred contact information (ex. email, office, cell) and best time to reach you
3. 

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Current role in your district
  - School counselor
  - Administrator (assistant/associate/dean of students)
  - Both school counselor/administrator
  - Other
4. Level of current role in your district
  - Elementary
  - Middle School/Junior High
  - High School
  - PK/K-12 position
  - District
  - N/A
5. Setting of school/district
  - Urban
  - Suburban
  - Small Town/Rural
6. Years of experience in current role
  - 1-3 years
  - 4-6 years
  - 7-10 years
  - 15 +
7. Please indicate your gender identity
8. 

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Race (choose all that apply)
  - White or European American
  - Hispanic/Latino
  - Black or African American (including African and Afro-Caribbean)
  - American Indian or Alaska Native
  - Asian or Asian American (including Indian subcontinent)
  - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - Multi-racial
  - Prefer not to answer

## APPENDIX D

### CONSENT FORM

I invite you to participate in a research study being conducted by a researcher from The University of Iowa. The purpose of this study is to build a stronger understanding of the experiences of exemplary (awarded/recognized) school counselors and administrators and their relationship experiences with their school counselor or administrator counterparts when working for and with LGBT students. I am inviting you to participate in this study because you, your school, and/or your school counselor counselor/administrator counterpart have received recognition for making schools safer and more inclusive for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students. Approximately 12 people will take part in this study.

If you agree to participate, there are multiple levels to this study and you may choose to participate in one or more of the following activities:

- Participate in a 30-minute preliminary interview. Interview questions have to do with the examples of your work on behalf of LGBT students as well as the working relationship with your administrator/school counselor with respect to providing a safe and inclusive environment for LGBT students in your school. If willing and able, you may also be asked to share an email invitation to participate with your school counselor/administrator counterpart on behalf of the researcher.
- Participate in a 60- minute joint interview with your school counselor/administrator counterpart. Interviews will consist of questions about relationship experiences and leadership practices in your collaborative work on behalf of LGBT students. There are also questions about your training programs and suggestions you may have to help bolster the work of school counselors and administrators with LGBT students.
- Participate in a 30-minute follow-up individual interview to better enhance my understanding of your experience. This individual interview will cover the same topics as the previous interviews.

The interviews will be facilitated over three sessions and conducted via phone and/or in-person. The total time commitment for your participation in this study will be 2-3 hours over a two-month period. You are free to skip any questions that you prefer not to answer throughout your participation in this research.

One aspect of this study involves making audio recording of our interviews. The recordings will then be transcribed, either by the researcher or a professional transcriptionist, and stored on a password-protected file on the researcher's password-protected laptop. Should the audio recording be transcribed by the professional transcriptionist, please know that they are bound by a confidentiality agreement. Only the researcher will maintain access to the audio and electronic files. The audio files will be destroyed 1 year following the completion of the study. The electronic transcript files will be destroyed 5 years following the completion of the study. The data will be retained for the aforementioned time frame for use in writing a report that summarizes the findings of the study.

I will ask that you choose a pseudonym to use during participation and your transcribed interviews will only include this pseudonym. You will have the opportunity to review a written transcript of your

interview and provide additional comments, feedback or clarifications you might have. This process will ensure I have captured your experiences and the meaning of your words.

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this study, please indicate this selection at the bottom of this form, decline over the phone, and/or return the survey without answering any of the questions.

I will keep the information you provide confidential, however federal regulatory agencies and the University of Iowa Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. A pseudonym will be assigned to your study data, which will be linked to your identifying information. After the study has been completed, the researcher will destroy the link between the pseudonym and your identifying information. If I write a report about this study, I will do so in such a way that you cannot be identified.

You make experience one or more of the risks indicated below from participating in this study. During the interviews we will discuss your individual and collaborative work with your school counselor/administrator counterpart on behalf of LGBT students. You may be uncomfortable talking about your advocacy experiences with the researcher or with your school counselor/administrator counterpart. It is possible that the things you talk about may impact your future relationship with your school counselor/administrator counterpart. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and can end your participation at any time. There is also a potential risk of loss of confidentiality due to the audio recording in this study and sending transcripts to the participants via dropbox.com. You will also not benefit personally from this study. However, I hope that others may benefit in the future from what I learn as a result of your collaborative work for and with LGBT students.

You will not have any costs for being in this research study and you will not be paid for being in this research study. Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to be in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, you won't be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.

If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact **Matthew Beck at (563)-340-7376**. If you experience a research-related injury, please contact: **Dr. Susannah Wood at (319)-335-5050**. If you have questions about the rights of research subjects, please contact the Human Subjects Office, 105 Hardin Library for the Health Sciences, 600 Newton Rd, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242-1098, (319) 335-6564, or e-mail [irb@uiowa.edu](mailto:irb@uiowa.edu). To offer input about your experiences as a research subject or to speak to someone other than the research staff, call the Human Subjects Office at the number above.

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Matthew Beck  
Doctoral Candidate- Counselor Education and Supervision  
The University of Iowa

APPENDIX E  
IRB APPROVAL

**IRB ID #:** 201605831  
**To:** Matthew Beck  
**From:** IRB-02            DHHS Registration # IRB00000100,  
                                 Univ of Iowa,    DHHS Federalwide Assurance # FWA00003007  
**Re:** Exploring the Experiences of School Counselors and Administrators in Their Work with LGBT  
                                 Students: A Phenomenological Study

---

**Approval Date:**            06/20/16

**Next IRB Approval**

**Due Before:**                06/20/17

**Type of Application:**

- New Project
- Continuing Review
- Modification

**Type of Application Review:**

- Full Board:  
Meeting Date:
- Expedited
- Exempt

**Approved for Populations:**

- Children
- Prisoners
- Pregnant Women, Fetuses, Neonates

Source of Support:

---

This approval has been electronically signed by IRB Chair:

Janet Karen Williams, PHD

06/20/16 0726

**IRB Approval:** IRB approval indicates that this project meets the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects. IRB approval does not absolve the principal investigator from complying with other institutional, collegiate, or departmental policies or procedures.

**Agency Notification:** If this is a New Project or Continuing Review application and the project is funded by an external government or non-profit agency, the original HHS 310 form, "Protection of Human Subjects Assurance Identification/IRB Certification/Declaration of Exemption," has been forwarded to the UI Division of Sponsored Programs, 100 Gilmore Hall, for appropriate action. You will receive a signed copy from Sponsored Programs.

**Recruitment/Consent:** Your IRB application has been approved for recruitment of subjects not to exceed the number indicated on your application form. If you are using written informed consent, the IRB-approved and stamped Informed Consent Document(s) are attached. Please make copies from the attached "masters" for subjects to sign when agreeing to participate. The original signed Informed Consent Document should be placed in your research files. A copy of the Informed Consent Document should be given to the subject. (A copy of the *signed* Informed Consent Document should be given to the subject if your Consent contains a HIPAA authorization section.) If hospital/clinic patients are being enrolled, a copy of the IRB approved Record of Consent form should be placed in the subject's electronic medical record.

**Continuing Review:** Federal regulations require that the IRB re-approve research projects at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but no less than once per year. This process is called "continuing review." Continuing review for non-exempt research is required to occur as long as the research remains active for long-term follow-up of research subjects, even when the research is permanently closed to enrollment of new subjects and all subjects have completed all research-related interventions and to occur when the remaining research activities are limited to collection of private identifiable information. Your project "expires" at 12:01 AM on the date indicated on the preceding page ("Next IRB Approval Due on or Before"). You must obtain your next IRB approval of this project on or before that expiration date. You are responsible for submitting a Continuing Review application in sufficient time for approval before the expiration date, however the HSO will send a reminder notice approximately 60 and 30 days prior to the expiration date.

**Modifications:** Any change in this research project or materials must be submitted on a Modification application to the IRB for prior review and approval, except when a change is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects. The investigator is required to promptly notify the IRB of any changes made without IRB approval to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects using the Modification/Update Form. Modifications requiring the prior review and approval of the IRB include but are not limited to: changing the protocol or study procedures, changing investigators or funding sources, changing the Informed Consent Document, increasing the anticipated total number of subjects from what was originally approved, or adding any new materials (e.g., letters to subjects, ads, questionnaires).

**Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks:** You must promptly report to the IRB any serious and/or unexpected adverse experience, as defined in the UI Investigator's Guide, and any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others. The Reportable Events Form (REF) should be used for reporting to the IRB.

**Audits/Record-Keeping:** Your research records may be audited at any time during or after the implementation of your project. Federal and University policies require that all research records be maintained for a period of three (3) years following the close of the research project. For research that involves drugs or devices seeking FDA approval, the research records must be kept for a period of three years after the FDA has taken final action on the marketing application.

**Additional Information:** Complete information regarding research involving human subjects at The University of Iowa is available in the "Investigator's Guide to Human Subjects Research." Research investigators are expected to comply with these policies and procedures, and to be familiar with the University's Federalwide Assurance, the Belmont Report, 45CFR46, and other applicable regulations prior to conducting the research. These documents and IRB application and related forms are available on the Human Subjects Office website or are available by calling 335-6564.

**IRB ID #:** 201605831

**To:** Matthew Beck

**From:** IRB-02            DHHS Registration # IRB00000100,  
Univ of Iowa,    DHHS Federalwide Assurance # FWA00003007

**Re:** Exploring the Experiences of School Counselors and Administrators in Their Work with LGBT  
Students: A Phenomenological Study

---

**Approval Date:** 08/19/16

**Next IRB Approval**

**Due Before:** 06/20/17

**Type of Application:**

- New Project
- Continuing Review
- Modification

**Type of Application Review:**

- Full Board:
- Meeting Date:
- Expedited
  
- Exempt

**Approved for Populations:**

- Children
- Prisoners
- Pregnant Women, Fetuses, Neonates

**Source of Support:** Personal Funds

---

This approval has been electronically signed by IRB Chair:

Laura Dallas, BS

08/19/16 1033

**IRB Approval:** IRB approval indicates that this project meets the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects. IRB approval does not absolve the principal investigator from complying with other institutional, collegiate, or departmental policies or procedures.

**Agency Notification:** If this is a New Project or Continuing Review application and the project is funded by an external government or non-profit agency, the original HHS 310 form, "Protection of Human Subjects Assurance Identification/IRB Certification/Declaration of Exemption," has been forwarded to the UI Division of Sponsored Programs, 100 Gilmore Hall, for appropriate action. You will receive a signed copy from Sponsored Programs.

**Recruitment/Consent:** Your IRB application has been approved for recruitment of subjects not to exceed the number indicated on your application form. If you are using written informed consent, the IRB-approved and stamped Informed Consent Document(s) are attached. Please make copies from the attached "masters" for subjects to sign when agreeing to participate. The original signed Informed Consent Document should be placed in your research files. A copy of the Informed Consent Document should be given to the subject. (A copy of the *signed* Informed Consent Document should be given to the subject if your Consent contains a HIPAA authorization section.) If hospital/clinic patients are being enrolled, a copy of the IRB approved Record of Consent form should be placed in the subject's electronic medical record.

**Continuing Review:** Federal regulations require that the IRB re-approve research projects at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but no less than once per year. This process is called "continuing review." Continuing review for non-exempt research is required to occur as long as the research remains active for long-term follow-up of research subjects, even when the research is permanently closed to enrollment of new subjects and all subjects have completed all research-related interventions and to occur when the remaining research activities are limited to collection of private identifiable information. Your project "expires" at 12:01 AM on the date indicated on the preceding page ("Next IRB Approval Due on or Before"). You must obtain your next IRB approval of this project on or before that expiration date. You are responsible for submitting a Continuing Review application in sufficient time for approval before the expiration date, however the HSO will send a reminder notice approximately 60 and 30 days prior to the expiration date.

**Modifications:** Any change in this research project or materials must be submitted on a Modification application to the IRB for prior review and approval, except when a change is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects. The investigator is required to promptly notify the IRB of any changes made without IRB approval to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects using the Modification/Update Form. Modifications requiring the prior review and approval of the IRB include but are not limited to: changing the protocol or study procedures, changing investigators or funding sources, changing the Informed Consent Document, increasing the anticipated total number of subjects from what was originally approved, or adding any new materials (e.g., letters to subjects, ads, questionnaires).

**Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks:** You must promptly report to the IRB any serious and/or unexpected adverse experience, as defined in the UI Investigator's Guide, and any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others. The Reportable Events Form (REF) should be used for reporting to the IRB.

**Audits/Record-Keeping:** Your research records may be audited at any time during or after the implementation of your project. Federal and University policies require that all research records be maintained for a period of three (3) years following the close of the research project. For research that involves drugs or devices seeking FDA approval, the research records must be kept for a period of three years after the FDA has taken final action on the marketing application.

**Additional Information:** Complete information regarding research involving human subjects at The University of Iowa is available in the "Investigator's Guide to Human Subjects Research." Research investigators are expected to comply with these policies and procedures, and to be familiar with the University's Federalwide Assurance, the Belmont Report, 45CFR46, and other applicable regulations prior to conducting the research. These documents and IRB application and related forms are available on the Human Subjects Office website or are available by calling 335-6564.

## APPENDIX F

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### Session 1: Individual Interview with Eligible Participants

##### Interview Questions:

###### **Opening/Background:**

1. How do you make meaning of your role as a school counselor or administrator (i.e., primary duties)?
  - a. PROBE: What is the most important part of your job?
  - b. PROBE: What was your preparation or models for this work?
  - c. PROBE: Can you talk about what brought you to this role?
  - d. PROBE: What challenges, if any, have you encountered and how have you navigated these?
  - e. PROBE: What strengths and resiliencies, if any, have you developed and how have these supported your work?

###### **Body of the interview:**

2. What does providing a safe and inclusive school climate for LGBT students mean to you?
  - a. PROBE: Are there any values or belief systems that have guided or influenced your view of self?
  - b. PROBE: What training/professional development, if any, has been transformative for you? In what areas might your work be strengthened/supported?
3. Describe your experiences in working to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for LGBT students?
  - a. PROBE: If applicable, how do you make meaning of the award/recognition you and/or your school received on behalf of LGBT youth?
  - b. PROBE: Could you talk about your demonstrated efforts and/or any supports that facilitated your work in being nominated and/or receiving recognition?
4. Describe your experiences in working with your school counselor/administrator counterpart on behalf of LGBT students?
  - a. PROBE: Do you think that you and counselor/administrator make a good team focused on supporting LGBT students? Why or why not?
  - b. PROBE: If applicable, what experience and/or expertise does each member bring?
  - c. PROBE: If applicable, how does the administrator's work compliment the school counselor's work?
  - d. PROBE: How many years have you worked together?
5. Is there any other information you would like to share regarding your experiences to improve the school climate for LGBT students?

## Session 2: Joint Interview with School Counselor-Administrator Teams

### **Opening/Background:**

1. Talk about how you have come to know each other.
  - a. PROBE: When did you get to know each other as a professional?
2. If you had to describe what your school counselor-administrator relationship means to you, what would you say?
  - b. PROBE: What words/qualities come to mind when you think about your relationship?
  - c. PROBE: How would you describe the role of trust in your relationship? Are there other important characteristics?
  - d. PROBE: Based upon your experiences, what makes your school counselor-administrator relationship work (or not)?

### **Body of the Interview:**

3. What does the LGBT student population mean to you? How do you define it?
  - a. PROBE: What does each member of your dyad bring to this work?
  - b. PROBE: What meaning do you make given the recent political and media focus on related LGBT issues.
4. Describe your experiences or perspectives as a school counselor-administrator duo in supporting the unique needs of LGBT students?
  - a. PROBE: Based upon your work together, are there any experiences that had the greatest impact on your work with LGBT students? If so, can you provide an example?
  - b. PROBE: From these experiences, what elements/characteristics within your relationship, if any, supported your work with LGBT students?
    - a. PROBE: If at all, what do you believe strengthened and facilitated your partnership for LGBT students within these experiences that you have described?
    - c. PROBE: What brought you to partner with each other?
    - d. PROBE: How, if at all, does the administrator's work compliment the counselor's work?
5. What has been your experience as a counselor-administrator team in utilizing LGBT-related activities, programs, and interventions?
  - b. PROBE: If so, how do you make meaning of your roles with these programs?
  - c. PROBE: How, if at all, have students, parents, staff, etc. benefited from your effective partnership for LGBT students? If they have, how?
6. What experiences, if any, would you say have been challenging for your dyad when working on behalf of LGBT students?
  - a. PROBE: Do you have specific examples?
  - b. PROBE: If applicable, how did your dyad make meaning to any opposing issues/values from various stakeholders (i.e., teachers, parents, community)?
  - c. PROBE: If so, how was this handled and what did you learn from these experiences?
  - d. PROBE: How, if at all, have you and your counterpart explicitly talked about similarities and differences in beliefs, preparation, and practices related to your shared work with LGBT students?
  - e. PROBE: How would you describe the level of support in your relationship?

7. If at all, how has your school counselor-administrator LGBT-inclusive team efforts been perceived by other educational stakeholders such as students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members?
8. Based upon your experiences, what does leadership mean and look like within your two-person team?
  - a. PROBE: Describe your decision-making processes within your team on initiatives that may or may not impact LGBT student populations?
  - b. PROBE: Are there other leaders in the school who partner?
    - a. PROBE: What distinguishes your partnership from theirs?
9. How, if at all, has your graduate education and/or other professional development opportunities prepared you to address the unique needs of LGBT student populations as a counselor-administrator team?
  - a. PROBE: If so, have there been resources that have been more helpful than others?
  - b. PROBE: If applicable, describe your experiences in attending trainings together?
  - c. PROBE: What recommendations can you make for preparation programs and/or practitioners?
10. How, if at all, do you envision your counselor-administrator dyad being used as a model to equip other dyads with the necessary knowledge, skills, and awareness on how to address the challenges that LGBT students face?

### **Final Thoughts**

1. Is there any other information you would like to share related to your school counselor-administrator relationship experiences in creating affirmative programs and services for LGBT youth?

**Session 3: Follow-up Interview with Eligible and Nominated School Counselors and Administrators (Separately)**

**Opening/Background:**

1. Can you tell me about how you make meaning of your role as a counselor/administrator in your current position with LGBT students?
  - a. PROBE: Could you describe an example of an experience (personally/professionally) that has impacted your work?
  - b. PROBE: What brought you to this work? (i.e., motivation, interest)
2. Share what you hope to accomplish in your current role or position in the coming years with respect to LGBT youth.

**Body of the Interview: *Expansion of ideas from the joint interview***

3. How, if at all, has partnering with your counselor/administrator counterpart been a meaningful experience for you personally and/or professionally?
  - a. PROBE: How, if at all, has your relationship been a resource for you?
  - b. PROBE: What do you envision teachers, students, parents might say about your partnership?
4. In the previous session with your counselor/administrator counterpart, you mentioned \_\_\_\_\_ (i.e., support, communication, etc.). I am wondering how you make meaning of this?
  - a. PROBE: How, if at all, has this impacted (or not) your perception of the role and function of your counterpart?
5. What are your perspectives with respect to the training (i.e., graduate education, professional development) you have (or not) received with topics such as counselor-administrator relationships and LGBT students?
  - a. PROBE: What advice do you have for practitioners and training programs in your own profession (i.e., school counseling/educational leadership) in these areas?
  - b. PROBE: Do you have any additional suggestions for preparation programs and/or practitioners?
6. Is there any other information you would like to share related to your individual and/or school counselor-administrator relationship experiences?

## APPENDIX G

### EXPERT REVIEWERS

**Expert Reviewer #1:** This reviewer currently serves as an elementary principal, doctoral student, and leader for his school district's LGBT task force. In addition, this reviewer's school district received state-level recognition for supporting gender-specific practices and professional development for teachers.

**Expert Reviewer #2:** This reviewer is a former principal and professor in educational-leadership programs and currently serves as a dean for a college of education. This reviewer has contributed to the scholarly LGBT community through publications and presentations regarding the preparation of school administrators for work with LGBT students.

**Expert Reviewer #3:** This reviewer currently serves as a counselor educator and holds a leadership position in a national LGBT-focused counseling association. This reviewer has published in several counseling related journals and presented at national, regional, state, and local conferences on the role and function of school counselors with LGBT students.

**Expert Reviewer #4:** This reviewer currently services as a school counselor, advisor to a Gay-Straight Alliance, and works closely with building administration to ensure that LGBT students are provided with a safe and positive learning environment.

**Expert Reviewer #5:** This reviewer currently services as a counselor educator, coordinator of a School Counseling Program, and has prior experience as a counselor in K-12 public schools. This reviewer has published in numerous counseling related journals and presented at national, regional, state, and local conferences on the work of school counselors with LGBT youth.

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