School Counselor Advocacy with LGBT Students:

A Phenomenological Pilot Study of High School Counselor Experiences

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for Comprehensive Examination for the degree of

Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

Submitted by:
Maru Gonzalez
Social Justice Education Program
School of Education
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Committee Members:
Dr. Carey Dimmitt (Committee Chair)
School of Education
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Dr. Ximena Zúñiga
School of Education
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Pat Griffin
School of Education
University of Massachusetts Amherst
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... 5

II. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 6

   a. Conceptual Framework .................................................................................................. 7

   b. Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................... 8

   c. Limitations of the Study ................................................................................................. 8

   d. Research Questions ........................................................................................................ 9

III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES ...................................................................................... 12

   a. Settings and Participants ............................................................................................... 12

   b. Gaining Entry and Informed Consent ............................................................................ 13

   c. Data Collection ............................................................................................................. 14

      i. Interviews ...................................................................................................................... 14

   d. Data Analysis .................................................................................................................. 14

   e. Establishing Trustworthiness .......................................................................................... 15

IV. RESULTS ............................................................................................................................ 16

   a. Education as Advocacy ................................................................................................... 17

      i. Educating School Personnel ....................................................................................... 17

      ii. Educating Self ............................................................................................................. 19

   b. Social/Political Advocacy ............................................................................................... 19

      i. Community Collaboration ............................................................................................ 19

      ii. Legislative Activism .................................................................................................... 20

   c. School Climate Change .................................................................................................. 21

      i. Visible Displays ........................................................................................................... 21
ii. Collaborating with School Personnel.........................................................22

iii. Programming and Curriculum.................................................................22

d. Student Empowerment.................................................................................23

i. Advising an LGBT-friendly Club.................................................................24

ii. Providing Individual Support and Guidance.............................................25

iii. Encouraging Self-Advocacy.....................................................................27

e. Personal Commitment.................................................................................28

i. Motivation for Advocacy.............................................................................28

ii. Desire to Do More.......................................................................................30

iii. Overcoming Adversity..............................................................................30

V. DISCUSSION.................................................................................................32

VI. CONCLUSION............................................................................................37

VII. REFERENCES.............................................................................................39

VIII. APPENDICES...........................................................................................43
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  Research Questions and Correspondence to Interview Questions………………….10

Table 2  Interview Questions and Relation to Research Questions, ACA Competency Domains, and the Intersecting Social Identities Addressed…………………………11
Abstract

In recent years, advocacy has become a centerpiece of the school counseling profession, (American School Counseling Association (ASCA), 2005; Field, 2004). Nevertheless, there exists no empirical research on school counselor advocacy with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students and a dearth of conceptual research. To begin addressing this gap in the literature, the purpose of this phenomenological pilot study is to examine the experiences of three high school counselors who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students across identity groups. Findings from this study will inform my subsequent dissertation research, method and analysis. Using social justice education as a lens through the conceptual framework of the American Counseling Association’s (ACA) Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2002; Ratts, DeKruijf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007), themes are presented and explored as they relate to the various manifestations of school counselor advocacy and the factors that facilitate, motivate and hinder advocacy efforts. Suggestions for the next steps in this research are also discussed.
School Counselor Advocacy with LGBT Students:

A Phenomenological Pilot Study of High School Counselor Experiences

Over the past decade, the roles and responsibilities of school counselors have expanded beyond reactive mediation and individualized guidance to more proactive stances including systemic change and student advocacy at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels (Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Singh, Urbano, Haston & McMahon, 2010). Comprehensive in scope, the school counseling framework of the twenty-first century merges collaboration, consultation, leadership and data collection (ASCA National Model, 2005). A growing body of literature reflects this recent shift in the profession, as more scholars are emphasizing the need for school counselor advocacy in addressing issues of social oppression in schools (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Ratts, et al., 2007). In recent years, this call for advocacy has underscored the unique needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students (DePaul, Walsh & Dam, 2009; Goodrich & Luke, 2009; Whitman, Horn & Boyd, 2007) and the vast majority of scholarship on LGBT students has focused specifically on their experiences in high school settings (GLSEN, 2012). Nevertheless, education literature in general and school counseling literature in particular seldom examines students’ multiple marginalized identities (Chen-Hayes, 2001; DePaul, et al., 2009; Guitierrez, 2004; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004). In order to be truly reflective of all LGBT students’ experiences, school counseling scholarship must also consider the ways in which cultural contexts (Kosciw & Greytak, 2009) and other social identities—such as race and class—impact how this population navigates their gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender identity (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Kumashiro, 2001) and the extent to which such factors shape school counselor advocacy.
This manuscript first presents the conceptual framework that helped inform the interview and research questions and that shaped the data analysis. I then review the phenomenological design used in this study to examine the experiences of high school counselors who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students across identity groups. Finally, analysis of qualitative data, significance of the study, and recommendations for my subsequent dissertation research are discussed.

**Conceptual Framework**

Central to social justice education is the role of social identities in shaping individual experiences of domination and subordination in a hierarchical society (Bell, 2007). Additionally, social justice education critically analyzes systems of power and oppression at the interpersonal, institutional, and societal level and examines the various ways in which such structures manifest in schools and other social institutions and perpetuate hierarchical social group differences (Adams & Love, 2005). With a similar emphasis on systemic change, the ACA Advocacy Competencies are designed to address injustice at the individual, school/community, and public arena level both with and on behalf of students and clients (Lewis, et al., 2002). In this sense, the ACA Advocacy Competencies, guided by a social justice theoretical orientation, can be used as a framework for better understanding how school counselors engage in advocacy for and with students across identity groups. Specifically, the ACA Advocacy Competencies provide an outline for tackling broader systemic issues—including discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity—while addressing individual concerns and encouraging self-advocacy (Crethar, 2009).

The ACA Advocacy Competencies are categorized under three levels of advocacy: client/student advocacy, school/community advocacy, and public arena level advocacy (Lewis, et
al., 2002). Two domains and specific competency areas fall under each level of advocacy (See Appendix D, p. 46). The domains under the level of client/student advocacy include client/student empowerment and client/student advocacy. The school community/level of advocacy is focused on the domains of community collaboration and systems advocacy. Finally, the two domains included in the public arena level are public information and social/political advocacy. By including indirect and direct forms of action, the competencies provide a framework for social justice advocacy at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level (Ratts, et al., 2007).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of high school counselors who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students across identity groups in order to inform the subsequent dissertation study, method and analyses.

**Limitations of the Study**

Contextual factors such as geographical location, caseload and school climate theoretically affect the degree to which high school counselors can serve as advocates for and with LGBT students; as such, the phenomenon may manifest differently depending on the situation or environment. In this study, the participants worked in different schools and school districts and shared slightly different views on how to advocate for and with LGBT students. More specifically, it is likely that high school counselors who have served as advocates for LGBT students in other regions of the country might have different experiences than those described here. As such, the results cannot be generalized to all high school counselors who have served as advocates for LGBT students. In addition, only three high school counselors participated in this study; such a small sample set significantly narrowed the scope of the research and limits understanding of the central phenomenon.
Variance regarding the definition of advocacy may also be a limitation; high school counselor advocacy extends beyond issues impacting LGBT students across identity groups. Therefore, high school counselors who advocate on behalf of other issues may have a different perception or definition of advocacy. Finally, I acknowledge my individual biases as a researcher.

**Research Questions**

This study was driven by previous scholarship, the conceptual framework and the following research questions:

a) How do school counselors define advocacy within the framework of school counseling?

b) To what extent do school counselors advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups?

c) How do school counselors describe factors that facilitate and impede advocacy for and with LGBT students?

The research questions were guided by the comprehensive literature review and the conceptual framework, the latter of which was informed by both the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, et al., 2002) and a social justice education theoretical orientation. The research questions guided the interview questions (See Appendix B, pg.44) and provided a structured description of participants’ experiences. Table 1 presents the research questions and their correspondence to the interview questions.
Table 1: Research Questions and Correspondence to Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) How do school counselors define advocacy within the framework of school counseling?</td>
<td>5, 6, 7b, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) To what extent do school counselors advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups?</td>
<td>7, 7a, 7b, 7c, 9, 9a, 11, 11a, 12, 12a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) How do school counselors describe factors that facilitate and impede advocacy for and with LGBT students?</td>
<td>7c, 8, 8a, 9a, 12a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 on the following page illustrates the connection between the research questions, interview questions, the ACA Advocacy Competency Domains, and the specific intersecting identities addressed.
Table 2  
*Interview Questions and Relation to Research Questions, ACA Competency Domains, and the Intersecting Social Identities Addressed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>ACA Advocacy Competencies</th>
<th>Intersecting Social Identities Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Question a</td>
<td>Student, school, public arena</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Question a</td>
<td>Student, school, public arena</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Question b</td>
<td>Student, school, public arena</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a</td>
<td>Question b</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7b</td>
<td>Questions a &amp; b</td>
<td>Student, school, public arena</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7c</td>
<td>Questions b &amp; c</td>
<td>Student, school, public arena</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Question c</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a</td>
<td>Question c</td>
<td>School, public arena</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Question a &amp; b</td>
<td>Student, school, public arena</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9a</td>
<td>Question b &amp; c</td>
<td>Student, school, public arena</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Race, class status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Question b</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Race, class status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11a</td>
<td>Question b</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>All identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Question b</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Transgender specifically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12a</td>
<td>Questions b &amp; c</td>
<td>School, public arena</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methods and Procedures

A pilot study refers to a smaller version of a full-scale study (Holloway, 1997). In this design, the purpose of the pilot study was to test the qualitative interview questions in order to assess their adequacy (Baker, 1994). A phenomenological research design was used for this study. Phenomenology is “a study of people’s conscious experience of their life world” (Merriam, 2009, p.25). Phenomenological research, therefore, seeks to “describe the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). In this study, the phenomenon centered on the experiences of high school counselors who have considered themselves advocates for LGBT students. A phenomenological design was best suited to better understand this phenomenon due to the scarcity of empirical research regarding the practice of school counselor advocacy in this area.

Setting and Participants

The sample size for this pilot study consisted of three school counselors. The setting took place at two high schools in the southeastern United States, one urban and one suburban. Participants were drawn from two schools in order to explore varying perspectives on advocacy and to more closely examine contextual differences, primarily those related to school setting (e.g., urban, rural, suburban). The first site, Southern High School, was located in an urban setting and had a 70% graduation rate in 2012. Of the 1400 students enrolled during the time of the study, 55% were African-American, 18% were Latino, 7% were Multiracial, 2% were Asian and the remaining 22% were White. Approximately 70% of the student body received free or reduced lunch. Southern High School’s counseling department employed four full-time school counselors, one graduation coach and one department secretary.
The second site, Northern High School, was located in a suburban setting, served approximately 2,650 students, and had a graduation rate slightly over 96% at the time of the study. Approximately 79% of students were White, 8% were African-American, 6% were Latino, 5% were Asian and 2% were Multiracial. Additionally, six percent of students received free and reduced lunch. The students of Northern High School were served by five full-time school counselors, one graduation coach, one person in charge of testing for newly enrolled students, three secretaries, and one records coordinator.

Criterion sampling was used to identify and subsequently select participants; that is, the high school counselors chosen for this study met the predetermined criteria of having served as advocates for and with LGBT students (Creswell, 2007). School setting was also considered in selecting participants in order to examine and compare the experiences of high school counselors who worked in both urban and rural settings. To protect confidentiality, participants were given pseudonyms: (1) Marielle, (2) Tim, and (3) Lisa. Of the three participants, two were female and one was male; all identified as white, heterosexual and cisgender or non-transgender. Among participants, years of experience as a school counselor ranged in length between 8 and 12 years (See Appendix A, Table 1, pg. 43). Marielle worked at Northern High School and Tim and Lisa were both employed as school counselors at Southern High School.

Gaining Entry and Informed Consent

After identifying several high school counselors who had experience serving as advocates for and with LGBT students, I contacted them individually to review the purpose of the study and extend an invitation for participation. Follow up was made by phone and via email to coordinate interviews. Participants were given two informed consent forms, one to sign and return to the researcher and one for their own records (See Appendix C, pg. 46), and the study
was conducted in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) policy for the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Overall, three interviews were conducted.

**Interviews.** Consistent with most phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007), semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data collection in this study. Semi-structured interviews were used to better understand the lived experiences of high school counselors who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students (Merriam, 2009). An interview guide informed by the research questions was used to shape the questions and direct the interview (Bigdan & Biklen, 2007). Probes were used to gain more detailed information and obtain clarification from participants (Merriam, 2009). The interviews lasted between 37 and 61 minutes and were conducted over the course of one day. All interviews were audio-recorded; data from the recordings were transcribed, coded and analyzed.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis for qualitative research is an ongoing process that occurs throughout data collection (Merriam, 2009). Consistent with this approach, data analysis of interview content was continuously reexamined throughout the study. Interview data was carefully coded and grouped into categories as themes were identified. The research questions, conceptual framework and literature helped shape the initial coding scheme. Additionally, theoretical perspectives and my personal beliefs influenced which codes were applied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Preliminary codes included words, phrases, or overarching concepts that stood out as relevant after data were
initially reviewed and research memos (Creswell, 2007) were created to make sense of emerging themes.

Using the ACA Advocacy Competencies informed by a social justice education lens as a framework for determining initial codes, I analyzed the data to determine whether and to what extent participants demonstrated advocacy for and with LGBT students across identity groups and at what level (i.e., student, school, public arena). In addition, I made note of which of the advocacy competencies were being employed most frequently and by whom. After this initial analysis, a second analysis was conducted to establish broader categories. A final analysis identified developing themes that may not have fit within the original conceptual framework, including advocacy behaviors not included in the ACA Advocacy Competencies. I compared the interview data from participants in the same school and then between schools to obtain a comprehensive description of their experiences as advocates for and with LGBT students. Throughout the process and as additional themes were identified, I remained open to new codes and groups and frequently referred to my research memos for additional guidance and clarity.

Establishing Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness, a variety of data collection techniques were used. In addition to semi-structured interviews, a data review of school records was conducted to provide an objective and comprehensive depiction of the racial/ethnic and socioeconomic compositions of the student body at each school. I also kept a self-reflective journal during data collection and data analysis (Merriam, 2009). The data review provided more nuanced details often missing from interviews while the journals allowed me to bracket assumptions and judgments about schools counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students and keep track of my “presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process” (Mruck & Breuer, 2003, p. 3). I
also worked with a competent peer debriefer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to review the application and evolution of my research methods. Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy and could elect to clarify, add to, or underscore any points they had made during the interview.

Results

All participants in this study either considered themselves advocates for LGBT students and/or were referred to the researcher by colleagues who were aware of their advocacy efforts. Additionally, the school locations were chosen based on contextual differences in school setting. Of the two schools chosen, Tim and Lisa worked in the same setting: an urban, lower-income school where the majority of students were of color and received free and reduced lunch. Conversely, Marielle was employed at a school located in an affluent, predominately white suburb. Guided by my research questions, previous scholarship, and the conceptual framework, I explored participants’ motivations; definitions of advocacy; levels of advocacy engagement; and factors that facilitated and hindered their advocacy efforts with LGBT students across identity groups, focusing more narrowly on race and class. Although each participant’s experiences were unique, similarities in their stories were still found. Five thematic categories emerged from analysis of the data: (1) education as advocacy, (2) social/political advocacy, (3) school climate change, (4) student empowerment, and (5) personal commitment (see Appendix A, Table 2, pg. 43). While the first four thematic categories reflect the ACA Advocacy Competency Domains (Lewis, et al., 2002), the fifth—personal commitment—emerged as a unique category within the data, the details of which will be more thoroughly discussed later. These categories were not intended to represent the experiences of all high school counselor advocates, solely those included in this study. To ensure clarity of these categories and themes within the context of this
study, operational definitions are included when results for a category or theme are introduced. This section will present findings from the three semi-structured interviews. Thematic categories will be described in detail and supported by direct quotes from participants and the conceptual framework, when appropriate.

**Education as Advocacy**

Education as advocacy describes education as a tool for creating awareness about LGBT people or issues. Participants demonstrated this form of advocacy by educating school personnel about LGBT issues and/or educating themselves through various professional development opportunities to enhance their own knowledge of and competence with LGBT youth. Education as advocacy occurred on behalf of—rather than with—students at the school level (Lewis, et al., 2002).

**Educating School Personnel.** Participants in this study emphasized the importance of ensuring that teachers and administrators addressed issues related to social justice in general and sexual orientation and gender identity/expression in particular with sensitivity and understanding. Tim described educating school personnel as central to school counselor advocacy: “I think of advocacy with the adults in the building because we have to spend a lot of time kind of re-educating the adults kind of stuck in their own ways”.

Referring to LGBT students in particular, Lisa discussed “...a real responsibility to sort of be that voice, that advocate at the faculty meeting...to include those kids as part of a discussion when we talk about safe schools.” Participants also engaged in advocacy by confronting school personnel who made offensive or inaccurate remarks about LGBT people or issues. Such instances of advocacy were generally individualized, reactionary and aimed at
creating awareness about the impact of anti-LGBT language. Tim provided the following example regarding his interaction with a teacher:

   We have a ninth grade student who was transgender…she said, ‘Well, he was born with male parts so it’s a him and he needs to be going to use the boy’s bathroom.’….So then I spoke up and said, “You do realize we’re…talking about someone who is transgender. This isn’t a choice. This isn’t something that, um, this isn’t Halloween. This isn’t dress up. This is who this person is.

Marielle also described a specific instance in which she confronted a colleague who had made inflammatory statements regarding religion, culture, gender and sexual orientation on various occasions. Marielle further claimed that her graduate program—which she described as being grounded in “social justice” and advocacy—gave her “…the confidence to speak up when I hear other staff members…use words that are inappropriate and demeaning.”

   While all participants included educating school personnel as part of their advocacy efforts, only one provided an example that demonstrated a proactive response to LGBT issues. In addition to organizing a professional development training for teachers on school climate and LGBT students, Lisa underscored the need to advocate on behalf of students and giving voice to their needs and concerns: “In talking with teachers individually, talking, bringing things to the table that I hear from kids- that’s powerful to be able to say, ‘Well the kids are hearing or they’re feeling or whatever’”.

   Overall, participants expressed feeling supported by colleagues when engaging in education as advocacy. In particular, Lisa mentioned that teachers often approached her with questions or concerns regarding LGBT students or issues. As she put it, teachers, “…may say, ‘I don’t get this’ or ‘I don’t understand’ or ‘I’m having trouble.’”
Educating Self. Analogous to creating awareness among school personnel, two of the participants sought opportunities to further their own understanding and competence about LGBT students and issues. Lisa took advantage of events at a nearby university to expand her knowledge of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. In addition to attending a documentary premiere about anti-LGBT bullying in schools, she “went to a safe-space space, you know, one of their, I think, two-day trainings.” Marielle stated that deepening her own understanding of social justice matters through experiential learning in her graduate program has made her more comfortable advocating for and with LGBT students:

I think I’ve become more confident with that, you know, the more education you have and going to the LGBT youth center. You know, went to their—they have like a support group downtown with our professor and that was great…I mean the more education you learn, the more comfortable and confident you are.

Social/Political Advocacy

Social/political advocacy occurred when participants worked to create broader systemic change through community collaboration and legislative activism to change policy with and on behalf of students across identity groups. Contrary to education as advocacy, participants engaged in social/political advocacy at a systemic level and did so proactively. This category was directly referred to in the ACA Advocacy Competencies as a domain under the public arena level of advocacy and addresses policy or legislative advocacy (Lewis, et al., 2002). Although community collaboration falls under a different level in the conceptual framework, social/political advocacy—as defined in this study—is inclusive of community engagement.

Community Collaboration. Participants who engaged in community collaboration used their knowledge of “specific difficulties in the environment” (Lewis, et al., 2002, p. 2) to work in
partnership with organizations to create change. Two of the three participants interviewed—Lisa and Tim—explicitly mentioned community engagement and collaboration when describing their advocacy efforts. Their involvement was proactive and intended to create systemic change by working with community organizations to address issues impacting LGBT students. Lisa discussed her close relationship with a nearby university, noting she tries “to collaborate when we can.” She described her affiliation with one organization in particular:

We also have a great collaboration with the Lambda Alliance at the University so that was really important to me the first year. I was like, these kids need to look forward so I contacted them and that’s been great. We’ve had mentors who come and are really committed.

Specifically, Lisa described bringing in a transgender speaker from Lambda Alliance to speak with students. Community collaboration often overlapped with participants’ advocacy efforts within the school. Tim leveraged his community connections to collaborate with a local organization after a Latina came out to disapproving parents. For example, he arranged “…a meeting with her parents, with a PFLAG [Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays] group that were Latina as well.”

**Legislative Activism.** One participant—Tim—engaged in broader political activism when he felt that policy or legal intervention was necessary in order to foster systemic change. In an effort to strengthen the district’s non-discrimination policy, Tim described, “…talking with the superintendent to see if we could get our board of education to include language that would be inclusive of sexual orientation.” While no specific steps were taken to include gender identity/expression in the broader district policy, Tim worked with colleagues to alter his school’s bathroom policy for transgender students:
The solution from the group was to allow the student to use a faculty restroom so that the student wouldn’t have to be uncomfortable having to go into a male restroom nor would other students be uncomfortable having her in a female restroom.

Conversely, Marielle did not demonstrate legislative activism when she was faced with a similar situation involving a transgender student’s use of the restroom:

I had a student who identified as such on my caseload that we worked with. Um, this student wanted, I believe it was like to use the opposite bathroom and ended up saying, ‘Whatever, I’m just gonna go to the one that matches my genitalia’.

School Climate Change

Participants took various steps to cultivate a more positive and supportive culture for LGBT students across identity groups. Changing the school climate—as defined in this study—including displaying or distributing LGBT-affirming posters or literature, collaborating with school personnel, and organizing programming or curriculum around LGBT issues. Participants proactively engaged in advocacy at the school (Lewis, et al., 2002) level, both with and on behalf of students across identity groups. Lisa underscored the importance of fostering a positive environment for LGBT students by ensuring that school, “…is a safer place and that people get it, you know, that these kids don’t have a voice and aren’t going to speak up and they’re some of the most at-risk kids.”

Visible Displays. The most common form of “school climate change” expressed by participants involved displaying LGBT-friendly posters or resources. All three participants who were interviewed for this study visibly displayed their support of LGBT students by including posters, stickers and other resources in their office. For example, Marielle placed a safe zone
sticker in a location that would be visible to students and faculty members: “…it was out on my window.” In addition to displaying a safe zone sticker in her office as a way of expressing support for LGBT students, Lisa made them available to other faculty members and students in the GSA she sponsored.

Collaborating with School Personnel. Among factors that facilitated school counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students was working with supportive school personnel. All three participants noted the importance of supportive principals and administrators in advocating for and with LGBT students. Lisa claimed that having a supportive principal “helps a lot” while Marielle stated that her principal “…wants our kids safe regardless who they are and their emotional safety is just as important as their physical safety.” Referring to a specific example regarding a bathroom issue with a transgender student, Tim explained that, “The fact that he [the principal] has had this issue on his agenda at all tells me that he’s addressing it, that he knows that the student has a need and he was addressing it.” Aside from administrators, Lisa discussed her collaborative interactions with teachers: “There are so many…teachers who come in and say, ‘I want to come to the [GSA] meetings’ or ‘What can I do?’ or ‘I can’t help you sponsor but I’d love to help.’” All three participants mentioned instances of consulting and/or working with their fellow school counseling colleagues on a variety of advocacy initiatives. In particular, Tim worked with his colleague to implement a social justice-based activity for students:

It was a really cool activity where the kids had a lot of art projects, where they brought pieces from their own home culture and could talk about them….And then when you get to the end, they talk about sexuality.

Programming and Curriculum. Two of the three participants in this study engendered change within their schools by facilitating programs and curriculum that helped raise awareness
about issues impacting LGBT students. Participants were proactive in their efforts to facilitate effective programming and often included other faculty members in the process. Tim recalled a specific example in which he integrated issues of sexual orientation—though not gender identity/expression—into his classroom guidance lessons:

That was more targeted—especially in classes where there was a lot of bullying going on, either recipients or givers. And that was from a lot of stuff that we pulled from online resources, um, and it included a lot more resources about sexual orientation.

Similarly, Lisa regularly incorporated LGBT issues into classroom guidance lessons at the request of teachers, particularly around issues of bullying: “Teachers call us in when they want some help, when they hear some bullying.” In addition to implementing an inclusive-curriculum as a means of fostering a more affirming school climate, Lisa worked with members of the school community on a variety of LGBT-friendly programming initiatives:

April is the Day of Silence, the National Day of Silence- we do that. We’re part of, we’ve run the Mix it Up day at lunch day so we’ve made sure that that’s happened so, you know, we’re out and about definitely.

**Student Empowerment**

Student empowerment is central to social justice education’s ongoing aim to encourage marginalized populations—including LGBT students across identity groups—to understand their personal experiences within an unequal social system (Love, 2000). Additionally, student empowerment is included in the ACA Advocacy Competencies as a domain under the client/student level of advocacy. Consistent with that framework, student empowerment—as defined in this study—involved helping the students identify social and institutional barriers that
impede their well-being and assisting them in developing self-advocacy skills (Lewis, et al. 2002). Participants in this study took action to facilitate positive growth among LGBT students by advising LGBT-friendly clubs, providing individual support and guidance and encouraging self-advocacy.

**Advising an LGBT-friendly Club.** School counselors are well positioned to sponsor or advise LGBT-friendly school-based clubs such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2011). Two of the three participants in this study—Tim and Lisa—had experience co-sponsoring or being involved with a GSA at their school. All participants worked at schools with an established GSA or LGBT-friendly club, although Marielle indicated that students “…didn’t feel comfortable in this environment naming it Gay-Straight Alliance.”

Although Tim discussed previous involvement with his school’s GSA, Lisa was the only participant who spoke at length about her GSA co-sponsorship, which she described as “very diverse in terms of ethnicity and racial make-up.” Having served as the club’s co-sponsor for four years, Lisa shared a specific example of the various student-led initiatives that took place within the GSA:

We’ve had, at their initiative…petitions for teachers to sign in the morning when they sign in that they won’t tolerate any, you know, hate language and we include the language “for students for any reason including students identifying as LGBTQ”… and then the kids, they also have a table in the lunch room where kids can sign up so it’s just, again, to raise awareness…. the kids, it was great, they said when the teachers sign in they can get a sticker or they can give them to teachers as need be or administrators but they didn’t just want to hand them out.
They wanted to make sure they were giving them to teachers where it really was a safe space so I love that.

In addition to activism, Lisa discussed the importance of GSAs in providing supportive spaces for LGBT students to “…really share personal and family stories.” She also mentioned that issues of race and socioeconomic status were not raised as “big issues” during club meetings, adding that, “When you’re in here it’s all the pieces of them and it’s multi-faceted and they don’t have to save face in here so you pretty much hear anything the way you would about any complex kind of kid.”

Provisioning Individual Support and Guidance. Although participants in this study displayed varying degrees of advocacy, they all demonstrated the same unwavering commitment to support individual students. Tim underscored the importance of individual student support and guidance in his description of school counselor advocacy: “I am always, first and foremost, student-centered and so advocacy…is to meet whatever needs the student has.” All participants talked about providing emotional guidance to students who are in the process of coming out to their parents and school community. In particular, Lisa emphasized the need to “listen” and “validate feelings” and added,

I can point out…their resiliency and like just, ‘Hang in there, you know, and pretty soon it’s going to be your chance to paint the picture of your own life and that the odds are that your parents don’t want to lose you and that they love you.’

Similarly, Tim revealed that some of his students “…would be out to me but…would never want their family…or friends to know it because they didn’t want to face ridicule.” In addition to supporting students learning to navigate their sexual and gender identities, all participants shared examples of individual advocacy with LGBT students with multiple
marginalized identities. For example, Tim revealed that students of color in particular tend to be “a little more open…because they’ve already been marginalized for some other reason and so that tends to be their response, to say, ‘I’m already different.’” For example, he stated that “most of the African-American males who are out have been willing to be completely out.” Correspondingly, Lisa described that for LGBT students of color, their sexual orientation and/or gender identity is “another layer” and added, “It’s more on their plate.” Religion in particular seemed to intersect with race. Lisa expressed,

For the African-American kids, that’s a big issue and other kids too but those are the ones that stand out in my mind where they feel rejected no matter what. They’re religion is important to them but they’re going to get messages at home or at church.

Tim shared a similar experience regarding the individual support he provided for a Latina student as she navigated the coming out process with her parents, both of whom he described as “devout Catholics.” According to Tim, her parents’ attitude was one of, “‘We love you and we accept you. We can’t accept this about you. We’re never going to.’” Learning to navigate the cultural differences, Tim provided a space for the young Latina student to process the complexities of her coming out. As he described, “We went through years, two years of bawling, crying, depression, and ‘I want to be accepted by my parents.’”

Marielle also provided an example of individual support and guidance with a Black, lower-income lesbian student for whom, “it was more of the struggle with the low income; that was the issue.” As Marielle recalled,

If she missed her bus at home, she would have to ride public transportation because we provided transportation. Well there were often times she missed the
bus. She was stuck, no money and if she missed the little bus to get there, we’d have to find a way for her to get to the station and get on the bus. I mean so logistically that part. She was taking online classes she needed to graduate that she couldn’t pay for, um, and it was requirements needed and she couldn’t come up with the costs and didn’t have the resources at home- a printer, ink, a computer so that was a major academic struggle for her.

According to Marielle, this student in particular interacted with mostly other African-American students and mentioned that Black students often struggle to fit in: “From talking to an African-American assistant principal who had children come up in this school, it’s very difficult.” With regard to supporting transgender and gender non-forming students, participants did not provide any specific examples of individual guidance.

**Encouraging Self-Advocacy.** According to the ACA Advocacy Competencies, one of the objectives of counselor advocacy is to foster students’ sense of their own personal power (Lewis, et al., 2002). Such an aim is also consistent with social justice education which seeks to empower marginalized students to take individual and collective action against the systems of domination that sustain their subordinate status in the classroom (Love, 2000). Additionally, school counselors are encouraged to work with—not solely on behalf of—students so that they can feel comfortable and knowledgeable enough to advocate for themselves. For instance, Lisa described advocacy as helping “…the kids develop a voice” and added, “It’s always been really important to have the kids learn how to navigate themselves.” Lisa provided a specific example of the positive impact of GSA membership on students’ empowerment:
I’ve seen, yeah, our president this year—she’s an amazing young woman. She came from the first day of ninth grade that we had a meeting and she’s in 11th grade now, was soft spoken, was pretty shy. Now she’s our president.

Lisa also encouraged student leaders to engage in school-wide efforts aimed at effecting systemic change and provided support throughout the process, telling them, “This is a great idea, love your activism. Now how can you do it? What is it going to look like?” Similarly, Tim underscored the importance of self-advocacy in the home, describing advocacy as “…helping students talk with their parents so they can see things from a different perspective.”

**Personal Commitment**

In this study, participants demonstrated a personal commitment to advocacy with LGBT students by discussing their motivations, expressing a desire to do more, and overcoming adversity. They discussed an inherent responsibility to advocate for all students regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. They also acknowledged that they could—and should—be doing more to advocate for and with LGBT students. Although personal commitment is not addressed by the conceptual framework, the data from this study indicate that it impacts the degree to which school counselors advocate with LGBT students, the implications of which will be further explored in the discussion section.

**Motivation for Advocacy.** Participants in this study viewed advocacy with LGBT students as a professional obligation. Lisa and Tim both described advocacy as a “responsibility.” Similarly, Marielle noted that “advocacy is constantly present on the job.” Acknowledging her heterosexual privilege in responding to anti-LGBT language, she asserted, Bottom line, it’s hurtful. It’s hurtful and whether the student identifies as LGBTQ, their parent identifies as LGBTQ, it’s hurtful to somebody so I can’t, I have a
voice and I’m not saying that those who identify like that don’t but I have a voice and if I can use it then I will.

Participants also revealed that their motivations for advocacy were personal and often deeply rooted in their personal character and lived experiences. Tim conveyed his desire to advocate on behalf of broader LGBT issues began after his brother came out as gay. Tim’s student advocacy began as a counseling intern when a gay student opened up to him about his sexual orientation. Tim recalled the incident as follows:

I didn’t realize what a gift that was but he, he wasn’t out to anyone and so that was… and as I processed through that with my professors and, you know, helped him decide to, you know, he was ready. He wanted to come out to other people and he decided not to do that until after he left high school but that was a really seminal part, I think, of my development as a counselor because I knew it was about relationships, that I wanted to help people just like him and that it is in a strange world that he had to trust a stranger.

Related, Lisa described her motivation for advocacy as, “…just sort of who I am. I don’t know how to be quiet but I, again, try to say it in a way that people can hear it.” Encouraged by the students she works with in the GSA, Lisa added: “I feel passionate. I get excited and then I become aware of the things that I’m really proud of the kids and what they’ve done and what they’ve accomplished.” All participants expressed an internal motivation for advocacy. Referring to her desire to integrate social justice issues into her graduate program, Marielle noted,

Our cohort came together and said, ‘This is something that we also feel passionate about so whether the instructor brings it in, we are.’
Desire to Do More. Although participants demonstrated a commitment to—and track record of—advocacy for and with LGBT students, they aspired to take additional steps to foster safer, more affirming learning environments for LGBT students. Referring to the need for increased visibility of LGBT-related events and youth centers, Marielle expressed, “I mean there’s no publicity here. It would be great to have fliers up and information about that and locations, dates and times.” In reference to her school’s propensity toward reactivity when it comes to advocacy with LGBT students, Marielle added, “I don’t think there are things done that sort of create a more affirming culture.” Tim and Lisa indicated that issues of gender identity were not included in the broader discourse on LGBT issues in schools. Recalling an incident involving a transgender student’s use of the public restroom, Lisa stated: “We need to do more to have things in place before things happen.” Tim and Lisa also emphasized the need to include protections for LGBT students in the district’s non-discrimination policy. While Lisa expressed frustration with the district’s reluctance to strengthen existing policy, she maintained her commitment to advocacy, “The non-discrimination thing… Their board members, um, who’d been approached and it’s sort of the thing like, ‘We don’t have that problem in our district’ which really sounds like way backward. So we keep doing our work”.

Overcoming Adversity. All participants described their principals as supportive of their advocacy for and with LGBT students. More broadly, Tim and Lisa described the climate as supportive and affirming of LGBT students across identity groups. Conversely, Marielle had a different experience, which impacted both the experiences of LGBT students and potential collaborative efforts with other faculty members. In describing the school environment, Marielle claimed, “I would definitely not say [it’s] affirming. I feel like it’s kind of been this good ol’ boy
kind of environment for years that I feel like the students, the comfort level of coming out is not there.”

Marielle later discussed the initial fears she had in working in a conservative school district as a new counselor, without the proper “resources” and asked herself, “being a new counselor in a school that’s very, um, conservative, how accepting would that be?” While Tim and Lisa agreed that their school was inclusive and supportive of LGBT students, they also expressed concerns about living in a conservative, deeply religious region of the country. Tim recounted a specific incident in which a school counselor in a neighboring county was, “literally almost run out of town for, um, allowing students to have these conversations.” He then added, “It was really difficult. It made us a bit gun shy.” Lisa shared similar sentiments:

I think there’s still a lot of people—especially here in the Bible Belt and even the parts that are more rural who really just, for religious reasons or whatever just can’t, you know, it’s hard for them so I have to, you know, respect that and do what I can.

While all participants acknowledged the risks inherent in advocating for and with LGBT students, they maintained a steadfast commitment. Tim expressed, “I don’t have any fear of my own reputation in the community, for example because I’m just opening up the door for kids.” In addition to continuing their advocacy efforts in the face of adversity, participants acknowledged that the school climate was improving for LGBT students and their allies, making it easier to advocate for and with them. Lisa and Tim both mentioned that their school’s GSA was initially called “Human Rights Club” at the former principal’s request. Lisa stated that when the GSA was first established, there were “a lot of phone calls from parents” and “community members.”
She also noted that “...there was a time when people wouldn’t say, wouldn’t announce the PFLAG scholarship.”

In spite of the challenges involved with being an advocate, the results from this study demonstrate various ways in which school counselors engage in advocacy with LGBT students across identity groups. From providing individual support and changing the school climate to lobbying for policy changes and collaborating with community members, participants in this study demonstrated a steadfast commitment to ensuring “equal opportunity and respect for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity” (ASCA, 2007).

**Discussion**

This pilot study was designed to examine the experiences of three high school counselors who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students in order to gain a deeper understanding of how high school counselors engage in advocacy with LGBT students across identity groups and what factors encourage or hinder their advocacy efforts. The purpose of this study was guided by a social justice education theoretical lens and the ACA Advocacy Competencies, previous literature and three overarching research questions: (1) How do school counselors define advocacy within the framework of school counseling? (2) To what extent do school counselors advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups? (3) How do school counselors describe factors that facilitate and impede advocacy for and with LGBT students?

Participants in this study—employed at two different high schools in both urban and suburban settings—engaged in advocacy at various levels and to varying degrees both with and on behalf of LGBT students across identity groups. A careful analysis of the data, informed by the conceptual framework and research questions, generated five thematic categories which
provide further insight on the advocacy behaviors of school counselors and the various factors which impact how and the extent to which high school counselors advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups: (1) education as advocacy, (2) social/political advocacy, (3) school climate change, (4) student empowerment, and (5) personal commitment.

Unique to this study was the use of social justice education as a lens to explore, analyze, and more thoroughly understand the phenomenon of school counselor advocacy through the framework of the ACA Advocacy Competencies. While the ACA Advocacy Competency Domains of student, school, and public arena (Lewis, et al., 2002) were reflected in this study’s results, missing from the ACA Advocacy Competency Domains is the thematic category of “personal commitment.” Specifically, participants in this study demonstrated a personal commitment to advocating for and with LGBT students across identity through their motivations for advocacy, desire to do more, and their willingness to challenge barriers related to advocacy with a marginalized population. Personal commitment as a thematic category is also unique to scholarship related to school counselor advocacy, the whole of which focuses solely on “how” school counselors practice advocacy (Field, 2004; Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Schaeffer, et al.; Singh, et al., 2010) rather than exploring “why.” Future research should more closely examine personal commitment as a contributing factor to school counselor advocacy, as more thoroughly understanding the factors that motivate advocacy may prove helpful in understanding and subsequently improving “how” school counselors engage in student advocacy.

As noted in the comprehensive literature review, there exist only four empirical studies (Field, 2004; Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Schaeffer, et al.; Singh, et al., 2010) to date regarding school counselor advocacy in general and none related to LGBT students in particular. While participants in this study expressed a desire to be more proactive in practicing advocacy with
LGBT students, they described their advocacy behaviors as both reactive and proactive, individual and systemic. They also defined advocacy as collaborating with school personnel and members of the community and viewed student advocacy as a professional and ethical obligation. With the exception of the study conducted by Singh et al. (2010), such findings are unique to this study and offer a vision of advocacy consistent with recent reforms in the school counseling profession which call upon school counselors to serve as leaders, collaborators, and agents of systemic change (ASCA National Model, 2005; Education Trust, 1997, Lewis, et al., 2002).

Looking more narrowly at Field’s (2004) research, factors that impeded advocacy among participants included a lack of support from administrators and school personnel, heavy caseloads, an unclear job description and a sense of being undervalued. Limited support from administrators was also described as a potential barrier for advocacy with LGBT students by education and counseling graduate students (McCabe & Rubinson, 2008). Similarly, participants in this study underscored the importance of supportive colleagues and administrators in facilitating their advocacy efforts. Overall, two of the three participants in this study described their respective school climates as supportive and affirming of LGBT students. Varying degrees of support from administrators and other faculty could help explain the different levels at which participants in this study engaged in advocacy.

While not considered by the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, et al. 2002), contextual factors may have also played a role in determining the extent to which participants engaged in advocacy. Findings from previous empirical scholarship on school counselor advocacy (Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Shaeffer, et al., 2010) have revealed the potential impact of contextual factors. For instance, Fitch and Mitchell (2004) found that school counselors at high-
achieving and more affluent schools dedicated more time to advocacy-based initiatives than school counselors at low-achieving schools which tended to be poor and more rural. Although the sample set for this study was small, the findings yielded different results. Specifically, the two participants at the lower-income and lower-achieving school were more actively engaged in advocacy efforts for and with LGBT students across identity groups. These findings, however, may have been influenced by other variables such as a less affirming school climate. Results from this study suggest that contextual factors—such as school setting—may impact the extent to which school counselors advocate for and with students in general and LGBT students in particular. Additional research is needed to determine the effect of various contextual factors on both the experiences of LGBT students and the school counselors who advocate for and with them.

As reflected in the literature review, many educators, including school counselors, lack the competency and awareness to successfully advocate for and with LGBT students (Goodrich & Luke, 2010; Luke, Goodrich, Scarborough, 2011; Savage, Prout, & Chard, 2004). Much of the LGBT student-related scholarship has hence focused on strategies to effectively support and advocate for and with LGBT students (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2011; Graybill, et al., 2009). Consistent with the strategies outlined in the literature, participants in this study described a variety of practices to foster systemic change including educating teachers and other school personnel, advising or supporting LGBT-friendly clubs such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), lobbying for LGBT-inclusive policies, and increasing the visibility of LGBT-affirming resources in the school. These behaviors are also reflective of the more wide-reaching social/political and systems-based advocacy practices encouraged by recent school counseling reform models (ASCA National Model, 2005; Education Trust, 1997), the ACA Advocacy Competencies
(Lewis, et al., 2002), and social justice education (Bell, 2007). Also consistent with existing literature (Field, 2004; Graybill, et al., 2009; Shaeffer, et al., 2010), advocacy strategies in this study were more often implemented at the individual rather than systemic level.

While not included as a specific thematic category, it is notable to mention that, compared to issues related to sexual orientation, participants expressed less knowledge of issues related to transgender and gender non-conforming students and did not take steps to integrate transgender issues into the curriculum, although Lisa did invite a community member to speak at a GSA meeting. Additionally, participants described having less interaction with transgender and gender non-conforming students. Participants also mentioned less competence with issues of gender identity and expression. One of the participants, Marielle, even demonstrated a lack of initiative to alter the bathroom policy in order to accommodate a transgender student who was on her caseload. While unfortunate, these findings are consistent with literature on LGBT students in general and transgender and gender non-conforming youth in particular. Scholarship regarding the experiences of LGBT youth often focuses less on gender identity/expression than sexual orientation, thereby rendering the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming students invisible (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2011). Furthermore, journal articles often incorporate “T” in the acronym “LGBT”, even when transgender individuals are not represented in the data (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2011). The findings in this study underscore the need to conduct additional research on school counselor competence and advocacy specifically with transgender and gender non-conforming students.

Results from this study also indicated that LGBT students who are navigating multiple marginalized identities face additional challenges, a finding consistent with previous research (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Hunter, 2001; Kumashiro, 2001). Additionally, findings revealed that
other social identities, including race and class, may be more salient for LGBT students of color and LGBT lower-income students than sexual orientation or gender identity (McCready, 2001; Greene, 1998). In order for school counselors to be more effective advocates for and with LGBT students of color and lower-income students, additional research is needed to further explore their complex experiences. More broadly, while this study yielded important findings that contribute to school counseling and LGBT youth-related literature, further scholarship is required to more thoroughly comprehend school counselor advocacy in general and as it relates to LGBT students across identity groups. Contextual factors—such as school setting—should be more closely examined in future studies to determine the degree to which they impede or facilitate advocacy efforts. Including field observations of high school counselors actively engaging in advocacy for and with LGBT students as an additional method of data collection may also provide a richer, more accurate understanding of what school counselor advocacy “looks like” in practice. Finally, more research is needed to assess the effectiveness of advocacy training in school counseling graduate programs and professional development workshops.

**Conclusion**

Although school counselors are uniquely positioned to serve as advocates for underrepresented youth (ASCA, 2005; Ratts, et al., 2007), to date there exists no empirical scholarship on school counselor advocacy with LGBT students and limited conceptual research. Using the ACA Advocacy Competencies as a conceptual framework and guided by a social justice education theoretical lens, this phenomenological study examined the experiences of three high school counselors who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students across identity groups. More specifically, high school counselors in both urban and suburban settings described
how they define and engage in advocacy with LGBT students across race and class differences, identified motivations for advocacy engagement, and explained factors that have impeded or facilitated their advocacy efforts. Findings contribute to the literature by providing a deeper understanding of school counselor advocacy in general and with LGBT students across identity groups in particular. Information generated from this study will be used to inform future dissertation research.
References


Running head: ADVOCACY WITH LGBT STUDENTS


Appendix A
Tables

Table 1

*Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years as a School Counselor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marielle</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>heterosexual</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>heterosexual</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>heterosexual</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

*Thematic Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Category</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education as advocacy</td>
<td>Educating school personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educating students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/Political Advocacy</td>
<td>Community collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legislative activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School climate change</td>
<td>Visible displays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborating with school personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Programming &amp; curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student empowerment</td>
<td>Advising an LGBT-friendly club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing support and guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouraging self-advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal commitment</td>
<td>Motivation for advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admitting shortcomings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overcoming adversity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B
Interview Questions for School Counselors

Opening questions:

1) How long have you been a school counselor?
2) Have you been at this site the entire time?
3) Where did you complete your school counseling graduate program?

Body of the interview:

4) Tell me about the work you do as a school counselor (i.e., primary responsibilities)
5) How do you define advocacy within the framework of school counseling?
6) How do you view yourself as an advocate within that framework? Can you give me an example?
7) Describe your experiences serving as an advocate for and with LGBT students.
   a) Be sure to include how participant first got involved (i.e., what motivated him/her?)
   b) Specifically ask about involvement at the student, school and systemic/public arena levels (as outlined in the ACA Advocacy Competencies).
   c) Can you give me a rewarding experience? A not-so-rewarding experience (i.e., difficult, did not turn out how you wanted)? What would you have done differently?
8) Tell me about some of the challenges/barriers you have faced—if any—in advocating for and with LGBT youth.
   a) What facilitates your advocacy efforts within the school? Community?
9) The American School Counselor’s Association’s position statement on LGBTQ youth reads, “Professional school counselors promote equal opportunity and respect for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation/gender identity. Professional school counselors work to eliminate barriers that impede student development and achievement and are committed to academic, personal/social and career development of all students.” Describe for me, based on your experience, if and how your colleagues within the field of school counseling uphold this obligation at the student, school, and systemic levels (define/elaborate levels if necessary).
   a) If not, what’s missing/ what is holding them back? What needs to happen for school counselors to be better advocates for LGBT youth?
10) Describe the demographics in your school with regard to race and class. What is the climate like for students of color and lower-income students? Climate for LGBT students of color and LGBT low-income students?
11) Tell me about your experience working with LGBT students of color and those from working class backgrounds? (ask about distinct challenges, competency, etc.)
a) To what extent was advocacy in general and advocacy with LGBT students across identities covered in your school counseling graduate program?

12) Tell me about your experience working with transgender students specifically?
   a) Ask follow up questions that get at distinct challenges, competency/awareness, and pushback from administration/parents, etc.

13) Is there anything else you would like to share?
Appendix C
Informed Consent

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Researcher(s): Maru Gonzalez, Researcher
Carey Dimmitt, Faculty Sponsor

Study Title: Advocates for and with LGBT students: A phenomenological study of school counselors’ experiences

Dear __________________,

I am interested in examining the experiences of high school counselors who have served as advocates for and with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students. I will be conducting qualitative interviews to explore this phenomenon as a pilot for my dissertation at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and am inviting you to participate. The purpose of this research is to explore ways in which high school counselors advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups. Participation in this study will involve a semi-structured in-person interview lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. Your name and other identifiers will not appear when I present this study or publish its results. Although you may be quoted directly, your actual name will not be used. The interview will be audio recorded and the recordings will then be transcribed. No identifying information will be included in the transcribed interview. All data gathered from participation—both written and audio recorded—will be kept in a secure location and destroyed upon the study’s completion. Participation in this study is voluntary and no compensation will be provided. At any time during the study, you may withdraw your participation. A copy of your transcribed interview will be available upon request and the opportunity to clarify content will be provided. Thank you in advance for considering this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or my dissertation chair, Dr. Carey Dimmitt. I may be reached via email at mariag@educ.umass.edu or by phone at 770-361-1555. My dissertation chair, Dr. Carey Dimmitt, may be reached by email at cdimmitt@educ.umass.edu.

Thank you,

Maru Gonzalez

I have read the information above and reviewed it with the researcher. I understand the study and give my consent to participate.

____________________________________________
Participant Name (Please print)

__________________________________________
__________________________________________
Participant signature Date
Appendix D

ACA Advocacy Competency Domains

**Client/Student Empowerment**

An advocacy orientation involves not only systems change interventions but also the implementation of empowerment strategies in direct counseling with individuals, families, and groups. Advocacy-oriented counselors recognize the impact of social, political, economic, and cultural factors on human development. They also help their clients and students understand their own lives in context. This understanding helps to lay the groundwork for effective self-advocacy.

**Empowerment Counselor Competencies**

In direct interventions, the counselor is able to:

1. Identify strengths and resources of clients and students.
2. Identify the social, political, economic, and cultural factors that affect the client/student.
3. Recognize the signs indicating that an individual's behaviors and concerns reflect responses to systemic or internalized oppression.
4. At an appropriate development level, help the individual identify the external barriers that affect his or her development.
5. Train students and clients in self-advocacy skills.
6. Help students and clients develop self-advocacy action plans.
7. Assist students and clients in carrying out action plans.

**Client/Student Advocacy**

When counselors become aware of external factors that act as barriers to an individual's development, they may choose to respond through advocacy. The client/student advocate role is especially significant when individuals or vulnerable groups lack access to needed services.

**Client/Student Advocacy Counselor Competencies**

In environmental interventions on behalf of clients and students, the counselor is able to:

8. Negotiate relevant services and education systems on behalf of clients and students.
9. Help clients and students gain access to needed resources.
10. Identify barriers to the well-being of individuals and vulnerable groups.
11. Develop an initial plan of action for confronting these barriers.
12. Identify potential allies for confronting the barriers.
13. Carry out the plan of action.
Community Collaboration

Their ongoing work with people gives counselors a unique awareness of recurring themes. Counselors are often among the first to become aware of specific difficulties in the environment. Advocacy-oriented counselors often choose to respond to such challenges by alerting existing organizations that are already working for change and that might have an interest in the issue at hand. In these situations, the counselor's primary role is as an ally. Counselors can also be helpful to organizations by making available to them our particular skills: interpersonal relations, communications, training, and research.

Community Collaboration Counselor Competencies

In support of groups working toward systemic change at the school or community level, the counselor is able to:

14. Identify environmental factors that impinge upon students' and clients' development.
15. Alert community or school groups with common concerns related to the issue.
16. Develop alliances with groups working for change.
17. Use effective listening skills to gain understanding of the group's goals.
18. Identify the strengths and resources that the group members bring to the process of systemic change.
19. Communicate recognition of and respect for these strengths and resources.
20. Identify and offer the skills that the counselor can bring to the collaboration.
21. Assess the effect of counselor's interaction with the community.

Systems Advocacy

When counselors identify systemic factors that act as barriers to their students' or clients' development, they often wish that they could change the environment and prevent some of the problems that they see every day. Regardless of the specific target of change, the processes for altering the status quo have common qualities. Change is a process that requires vision, persistence, leadership, collaboration, systems analysis, and strong data. In many situations, a counselor is the right person to take leadership.

Systems Advocacy Counselor Competencies

In exerting systems-change leadership at the school or community level, the advocacy-oriented counselor is able to:

22. Identify environmental factors impinging on students' or clients' development.
23. Provide and interpret data to show the urgency for change.
24. In collaboration with other stakeholders, develop a vision to guide change.
25. Analyze the sources of political power and social influence within the system.
27. Develop a plan for dealing with probable responses to change.
28. Recognize and deal with resistance.
29. Assess the effect of counselor’s advocacy efforts on the system and constituents.

Public Information

Across settings, specialties, and theoretical perspectives, professional counselors share knowledge of human development and expertise in communication. These qualities make it possible for advocacy-oriented counselors to awaken the general public to macro-systemic issues regarding human dignity.

Public Information Counselor Competencies

In informing the public about the role of environmental factors in human development, the advocacy-oriented counselor is able to:

30. Recognize the impact of oppression and other barriers to healthy development.
31. Identify environmental factors that are protective of healthy development.
32. Prepare written and multimedia materials that provide clear explanations of the role of specific environmental factors in human development.
33. Communicate information in ways that are ethical and appropriate for the target population.
34. Disseminate information through a variety of media.
35. Identify and collaborate with other professionals who are involved in disseminating public information.
36. Assess the influence of public information efforts undertaken by the counselor.

Social/Political Advocacy

Counselors regularly act as change agents in the systems that affect their own students and clients most directly. This experience often leads toward the recognition that some of the concerns they have addressed affected people in a much larger arena. When this happens, counselors use their skills to carry out social/political advocacy.

Social/Political Advocacy Counselor Competencies

In influencing public policy in a large, public arena, the advocacy-oriented counselor is able to:

37. Distinguish those problems that can best be resolved through social/political action.
38. Identify the appropriate mechanisms and avenues for addressing these problems.
39. Seek out and join with potential allies.
40. Support existing alliances for change.
41. With allies, prepare convincing data and rationales for change.
42. With allies, lobby legislators and other policy makers.
43. Maintain open dialogue with communities and clients to ensure that the social/political advocacy is consistent with the initial goals.

*Source: Lewis, et al., 2002*