School Counselors' Education and Training, Competency, and Supportive Behaviors Concerning Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students

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Students who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual (GLB) may be one of the most stigmatized minorities in the educational system. Perhaps it is unique to sexual minority youth that they may face rejection not only from society, but also from their peers, teachers, and even parents (Warner & McKinney, 2003). Although some students choose to hide their sexual orientation from others in the face of hostile environments, many others choose to come out. The average age at which youth identify as GLB ranges from 15 to 17 years (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000), and research suggests that up to 15% of youth are not exclusively heterosexual (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007). These youth represent a significant and unique population within schools and need the support of professional school counselors.

The ethical standards of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2010) make it clear that GLB students deserve equal access to the school counseling program despite their sexual orientation. Furthermore, ASCA's ethical code requires school counselors to respect and affirm students of diverse sexual orientations and to develop awareness, skills, and knowledge to provide effective school counseling to GLB students (ASCA, 2010). For school counselors to acquire this level of competency, ASCA recommends that they attain educational, consultation, and training experiences related to sexual orientation (ASCA, 2010). Despite these standards, existing research demonstrates that many school counselors possess negative attitudes and feelings about sexual minorities, lack formal education and adequate sources of information about sexual orientation, possess low levels of training and competency concerning counseling GLB students, and infrequently demonstrate supportive behaviors to improve the school climate for sexual minority students (Fontaine, 1998; Monier & Lewis, 2000; Price & Teljohann, 1991; Satcher & Leggett, 2007; Sears, 1988, 1991).

Since the late 1980s, only a handful of studies have examined school counselors' educational and training experiences, perceived competency, supportive behaviors, and sources of information concerning sexual orientation and GLB students (see Fontaine, 1998; Monier & Lewis, 2000; Price & Teljohann, 1991; Satcher & Leggett, 2007; Sears, 1988, 1991). Regarding school counselors' education and training, one study reported that 50% of school counselors had attended a seminar or workshop on GLB issues, 35% had attended lectures or presentations in graduate classes, 16% had attended an in-service training, and 15% had completed a graduate course covering GLB issues (Monier & Lewis, 2000). Another study reported that only 33% of school counselors had participated in training with a GLB focus in the past 12 months (Satcher & Leggett, 2007). Although studies have demonstrated that approximately 70 to 90% of school counselors reported interest in obtaining training on GLB youth (Fontaine, 1998; Sears, 1988, 1991), a majority did not report receiving some form of training (Monier & Lewis, 2000; Sears, 1988, 1991). The most common sources of information about homosexuality reported by school counselors included professional journals, followed by mass media, gay or lesbian friends, and workshops or professional conferences (Fontaine, 1998; Price & Teljohann, 1991). Textbooks, on-the-job training, college courses, and in-service trainings were the least reported sources of information (Fontaine, 1998; Price & Teljohann, 1991).

Whereas some school counselors have sought training or informational resources about GLB youth, others have shown negative attitudes toward this population. Sears (1988, 1991) reported that almost two thirds of school counselors held negative attitudes and feelings about homosexuality, and few school counselors held positive feelings toward sexual minorities. Only one in five school counsel-
ors indicated that counseling GLB students would be professionally gratifying (Price & Telljohann, 1991). Price and Telljohann (1991) also found that only 25% of school counselors felt very competent in counseling GLB students, and 20% reported they were not very competent. Similarly, Fontaine (1998) evidenced that only 8% of school counselors self-reported a high level of competence in counseling GLB youth. Despite low levels of formal education/training and competency concerning sexual minority youth, up to 73% of school counselors have counseled GLB students or talked with students about sexual orientation (Fontaine, 1998; Monier & Lewis, 2000; Price & Telljohann, 1991; Sears, 1988, 1991).

Monier and Lewis (2000) surveyed school counselors’ GLB affirming behaviors at school. In their sample, 82% of participants reported they had confronted homophobic remarks; 71% asserted they had used non-heterosexist language; 58% reported they had confronted heterosexism; 30% reported they had displayed books, posters, or symbols; 26% reported they had encouraged discussion among students; 19% reported they had prepared educational materials; 15% reported they had discussed concerns at faculty meetings; 13% had assembled a resource packet; and 4% had started a support group for GLB students.

The findings above suggest that many students who are GLB or questioning their sexual orientation may not have access to school counselors who are prepared to address their unique needs and concerns. These students often face hostile school climates without the support of school professionals (Kosciw, Gretytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012). Results from a national school climate survey of youth found that 71% of youth heard homophobic remarks (e., “faggot”) frequently or often at school, and 82% of GLB youth reported experiencing verbal harassment (Kosciw et al., 2012). The survey also showed that 38% were physically harassed (e., pushed or shoved) and 18% were physically assaulted (e., punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon) in the past year because of their sexual orientation. Because harassment of GLB youth is often sexualized, 64% of sexual minority youth reported being sexually harassed at school. Finally, 48% of the youth reported that their personal property was stolen or deliberately damaged by other students (Kosciw et al., 2012).

As a result of being harassed and bullied, GLB students may skip school, perform poorly, or drop out. Many GLB students feel unsafe at school and fear going to school. Recent findings demonstrated that 32% of GLB students missed school at least once a month due to safety concerns (Kosciw et al., 2012). Moreover, students’ academic performance and educational aspirations can suffer when faced with a hostile school climate (Kosciw et al., 2012; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). Prolonged harassment and fear of school lead some GLB youth to drop out (Remafedi, 1987).

Students who are GLB not only suffer academically as a result of homophobia and heterosexism, but are also at risk for mental and behavioral health problems. A review of research studies on the health of sexual minority youth indicate that GLB adolescents experience higher rates of depression, anxiety disorders, suicidal ideation and behavior, substance use and abuse, and sexually transmitted infection (Institute of Medicine, 2011).

Although many youth remain resilient through adolescence, the aforementioned findings suggest that some sexual minority youth face an array of school and psychological problems and many may seek school counseling services when dealing with these issues. After considering the multitude of stressors GLB students may face during adolescence, the ethical standards of ASCA, and the paucity of research that has been conducted on school counselors’ preparedness and practice concerning GLB youth, the need to examine school counselors’ education, training, competence, and supportive behavior in relation to this population was clear.

Current Study
This study was grounded in the multicultural counseling theoretical perspective (Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996), which grew out of a call for more multicultural education in the counseling professions given the diverse populations in our society (Sue et al., 1982). This perspective holds that counselors need specific competencies in terms of attitudes, beliefs, awareness, knowledge, and skills in order to provide appropriate, sensitive, and effective counseling to individuals from different sociocultural groups (Arrendondo et al., 1996; Sue, Arrendondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue et al., 1982; Sue et al., 1998).

This study was designed to expand upon previous studies of school counselors and GLB students and to apply and evaluate the multicultural counseling theoretical framework with respect to sexual minorities. This study was driven by the following research questions: (1) What are high school counselors’ current levels of sexual orientation education and training, sexual orientation counseling competency, and engagement in supportive and affirmative behavior of GLB students? (2) Is sexual orientation education/training and counseling competency positively associated with GLB supportive behavior in school? (3) Does sexual orientation counseling competency mediate (Holmbeck, 1997) the relationship between education/training and GLB affirming behavior?
METHOD

Participants

Participants included 86 school counselors (82.6% female, 17.4% male) working in public high schools in the southeast region of the United States. The race/ethnicity of the sample was predominantly White/European American (80.2%), with 19.8% Black/African American participants. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 66 with a mean of 43.2 years (SD = 11.2). The vast majority of participants reported their sexual orientation as heterosexual (98.8%), with 1.2% reporting that they were gay or lesbian. The highest degree attained by most participants was a master’s degree (90.5%); 6.0% held an education specialist degree, and 3.6% held a doctoral degree. Reported experience as school counselors ranged from 1 year to 35 years, with a mean of 12.1 years (SD = 9.3). The self-reported geographic area of schools where participants worked varied; 42.4% were rural, 32.9% were suburban, and 24.7% were urban. Participants’ schools also varied in the number of students enrolled: 2.3% had 1-500 students, 22.1% had 501-1000 students, 29.1% had 1001-1500 students, 23.3% had 1501-2000 students, and 23.3% had 2001 or more students.

Measures

Background questionnaire. The researchers developed this questionnaire to gather information about demographics, school counseling experience, school context, and professional preparation on counseling GLB students. Demographic questions assessed each participant’s sex, race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation identity, highest educational degree attained, and years of experience as a school counselor. Also, one question asked if the participant had counseled sexual minority students in a school setting (yes or no), and another question used a Likert-type scale where participants rated their professional/educational preparation in counseling GLB students. By self-report, participants identified the geographic area (rural, suburban, urban) and estimated the approximate number of students enrolled at the schools where they worked.

School Counselor Sexual Orientation Education and Training Scale (SCSOETS). The SCSOETS was developed by the researchers for this study to assess participants’ educational and training experiences concerning GLB youth. It included workshops, presentations, books, conferences, journal articles, booklets, and courses (e.g., “I have taken a course in graduate school that covered issues facing GLB youth”). Seven of these items have been employed in other studies to assess school counselors’ training or sources of information concerning GLB students (see Fontaine, 1998; Monier & Lewis, 2000; Price & Telljohann, 1991). The measure asked participants to rate the truth of eight statements using a four-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not true) to 4 (very true). An overall sexual orientation education and training score was attained by averaging all items. Higher scores indicate higher levels of education/training concerning GLB youth. The internal consistency reliability in this sample for this scale was \( \alpha = .79 \), which may be considered good (DeVellis, 2012).

Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (SOCCS). Bidell (2005) developed the SOCCS to assess participants’ competency in counseling GLB clients. The scale uses 29 items and consists of three subscales: skills (11 items), knowledge (9 items), and attitudes (9 items). The measure asks participants to rate the truth of these statements using a four-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not true) to 4 (very true). The researchers slightly altered the wording of 17 items (i.e., substituted “students” for “clients”) to better assess participants’ counseling competency with students in a school setting. The skills subscale consisted of items related to counselors’ professional experiences that produce competent skills to counsel GLB students (e.g., “I check up on my LGB counseling skills by monitoring my functioning/competency via consultation, supervision, and continuing education”). The knowledge subscale consisted of fundamental knowledge of GLB issues that counselors need to understand in order to counsel competently (e.g., “There are different psychological/social issues impacting gay males versus lesbians”). Finally, the attitudes subscale contained homophobic and heterosexist statements that would impede effective counseling with GLB students (e.g., “When it comes to homosexuality, I agree with the statement: ‘You should love the sinner but hate or condemn the sin’”). Eleven items on the SOCCS were reverse scored to control for response bias. Subscale scores were derived by averaging items for each subscale, and an overall sexual orientation counseling competency score was attained by averaging all items. Higher scores indicate higher levels of competency in counseling GLB students. The internal consistency reliability in this sample was \( \alpha = .76 \) for overall competency, which was adequate (DeVellis, 2012). For the subscales, reliability varied from minimally acceptable to good: skills (\( \alpha = .75 \)), knowledge (\( \alpha = .65 \)), and attitudes (\( \alpha = .85 \)). The internal consistency reliability when the scale was constructed also varied from adequate to good: overall competency (\( \alpha = .90 \)), skills (\( \alpha = .91 \)), knowledge (\( \alpha = .76 \)), and attitudes (\( \alpha = .88 \); Bidell, 2005).

Gay Affirming Behaviors Scale (GABS). The researchers used the GABS (Monier & Lewis, 2000) to assess various behaviors participants had performed at school to make the school climate less homophobic/
RESULTS

Prior to analysis, the researchers screened the data for missing values, influential outliers, and agreement with the assumptions of linear regression analysis. Ten participants were excluded because a total of 86 respondents did not provide data on all GABs items. Missing value analysis using SPSS was performed on all categorical and continuous variables using MCAR test (97/99, p = .09). The mean imputation was used to replace the missing values when there was a pattern of missing data. The authors also examined variance inflation factor (VIF) scores of more than 10, which indicated that no multicollinearity was present. The differences were used to identify any outliers.

Regression analyses were performed using Statist (version 10).

Descriptive statistics showed that 90.7% of the high school counselors had discussed or talked with students who were GLB or questioning their sexual orientation. Concerning participants' self-ratings of being unprepared, the 5.2% of 24.4% of the participants indicated that they were very unprepared, 15.9% of the participants who were somewhat prepared, and 19.8% of the participants did not exist. The differences were used to identify any outliers.

Regression analyses were performed using Statist (version 10).

To examine the relationship between sexual orientation, educational achievement, and GLB affirmative behavior in school, the researchers performed multiple linear regression analyses.
TABLE 1: Response Percentages for Sexual Orientation Education/Training and Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Affirming Behavior (N = 86)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Not True</th>
<th>Slightly True</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation Education and Training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in workshops</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended presentations</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read books</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended professional conferences</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read journal articles</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read booklets or pamphlets</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed undergraduate courses</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed graduate courses</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Affirming Behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembled a resource packet</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed issues at faculty meetings</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged positive discussion among students</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displayed informational materials in office</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displayed posters or symbols in office</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitated a support group</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervened when heard homophobic remarks</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used non-heterosexist language</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** All values are percentages.

ear regression analyses. Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the primary study variables. Next, hierarchical regression modeling was used to predict GLB affirming behavior. Table 3 summarizes the results of the hierarchical regression analysis including unstandardized regression coefficients, adjusted $R^2$ values, and incremental $R^2$ values. The entry of variables into each model was based on multicultural counseling theory and the desire to control for demographic variables. In Model 1, GLB affirming behavior scores were regressed on participants' demographic characteristics including sex, race, age, sexual orientation, educational level, years of counseling experience, approximate size of the student body at the participant's school, and the geographic area of the participant's school. Sex, race, sexual orientation, and geographic area were dummy coded so that these categorical variables could be used as predictors in the regression models (see Table 3 for variable codes). The demographic variables accounted for a significant yet small amount of the variance in GLB affirming behavior scores, $F(9, 76) = 2.17, p < .05$, adjusted $R^2 = .11$. Model 2 takes into account the demographic variables with the addition of school counselors' sexual orientation education/training. In this model, sexual orientation education/training accounted for a significant increase in the amount of variance in GLB affirming behavior, $F(10, 75) = 5.89, p < .05$, adjusted $R^2 = .37$, incremental $R^2 = .26$. Model 3 adds the sexual orientation counseling competency subfactors of skills, knowledge, and attitudes. This third and final model explains a substantial amount of the variance in GLB affirming behavior, $F(13, 72) = 6.45, p < .05$, adjusted $R^2 = .45$, incremental $R^2 = .08$. Of the three models, Model 3 explains the largest amount of variance in GLB affirming behavior.

In Model 1, the only statistically significant predictors of GLB affirming behavior were educational level, years of counseling experience,
### Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Affirming Behavior (N = 86)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex (female = 1)</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (White = 1)</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation (gay = 1)</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td>0.36*</td>
<td>0.25*</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of counseling experience</td>
<td>-0.02*</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of the student body</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic area (Rural)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO education/training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO counseling competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>0.30*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>0.35*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>0.17*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental R²</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Sex was coded 0 = male, 1 = female. Race was coded 0 = Black, 1 = White. Sexual orientation was coded 0 = heterosexual, 1 = gay/lesbian. Educational level was coded 1 = master’s degree, 2 = education specialist degree, 3 = doctoral degree. Size of the student body ranged from 1 (1 to 500 students) to 5 (3001 or more students). Rural is the reference group for geographic area. SO = sexual orientation. * p < .05.

and the approximate size of the student body; however, in Model 2, the effect of years of counseling experience disappeared with the entry of sexual orientation education/training. Sexual orientation education/training was a significant predictor in Model 2, but the effect of this variable disappeared in Model 3 with the entry of the sexual orientation counseling competency factors. In this final model, skills, knowledge, and attitudes were all significant predictors of GLB affirming behavior. The relative importance of these three variables could be determined by comparing the regression coefficients (B = .30 for skills, B = .35 for knowledge, and B = .17 for attitudes) because they shared the same metric.

To examine if sexual orientation counseling competency mediated the relationship between sexual orientation education/training and GLB affirming behavior, the authors used the bootstrapping method with bias-corrected confidence estimates (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004; Preacher & Hayes, 2004). The 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect was obtained with 1000 bootstrap resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Results of the mediation analysis are displayed in Figure 1 and confirm the mediating role of counseling competency in the relationship between education/training and affirming behavior (B = .28; CI = .17 to .42). The results also show that the direct effect of education/training on affirming behavior became nonsignificant (B = .16, t(84) = 1.70, p = .09) when controlling for counseling competency, which suggests full mediation.

### Discussion

Findings from this study indicate that the vast majority of participants have counseled and talked with students who are GLB or questioning their sexual orientation; however, the quality of school counseling services for this population is questionable because almost one third of participants felt professionally and educationally unprepared to work with sexual minority students. Also, only one in five participants felt very prepared to counsel sexual minority students. Some participants
revealed homophobic attitudes toward GLB students, which can negatively impact school counselors' interactions with sexual minority students. Based on the findings, about half of participants reported some sexual orientation education and training in the form of workshops and presentations; few had read scholarly literature about GLB youth, and not many had taken courses covering GLB youth. This lack of education and training may explain the low levels of self-perceived counseling competence. A majority of participants indicated engagement in interrupting homophobic language among students and not using heterosexist language, which is commendable. On the other hand, the majority of participants seemed to infrequently engage in other GLB affirming behaviors. This lack of active support for sexual minority youth in schools may contribute to the hostile school climate and dissuade students from approaching school counselors with issues related to sexual orientation.

Hierarchical regression results show that the school counselor sexual orientation counseling competency factors of skills, knowledge, and attitudes were the only statistically significant predictors of GLB affirmative behavior in the final model. This suggests that school counselors need comprehensive competence, which includes skills, knowledge, and attitudes, in order to perform behaviors that support and affirm sexual minority students. Furthermore, the predictors in the final model accounted for almost half \((R^2 = .45)\) of the variance in GLB affirming behavior, which is substantial.

Sexual orientation counseling competency mediated the relationship between sexual orientation education/training and GLB affirming behavior. This suggests that increasing school counselors' education and training on sexual minority youth leads to higher counseling competency, which enables school counselors to perform affirmative behaviors for sexual minority students. These findings are consistent with multicultural counseling competency theory (Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996).

Limitations

A limitation of this study was the use of purposive sampling. Another potential limitation was that school counselors who chose to participate may have been more interested in GLB issues than those who chose not to participate. Social desirability response bias may have been present given the self-report nature of the survey. Another possible limitation of the study is the low response rate; however, a low response rate does not necessarily lead to nonresponse error (Krosnick, 1999). Some final limitations are the moderately small sample size and lack of a national sample; thus, caution should be taken when generalizing these results.

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**Chapter 6: Sexual Minority Students**

**Future Research**

Further research is needed to replicate this study on a national level with a larger, more representative sample. Research is also needed comparing comprehensive pre-service school counseling training programs that are inclusive of issues and topics concerning sexual minorities and programs that disregard this population across competency outcomes and affirmative practice. Future research may also investigate school counselors' behaviors beyond those to improve the school climate in terms of direct practice with sexual minority students. A final direction for future research is school counseling and transgender youth. Although this population is often grouped together with GLB youth, transgender youth have been neglected in the research literature and face a number of distinct issues that do not relate to sexual orientation.

**Recommendations**

Based on the established ethical standards (ASCA, 2010) and findings from this study, the authors propose recommendations for school counselors, counselor educators, school administrators, and policymakers to improve school counseling services for GLB students.

**Recommendations for School Counselors.** School counselors can take several actions to improve the school climate for GLB youth. These recommendations are based on references from the practice literature (Bidell, 2011; Byrd & Hays, 2012; Cooley, 1998; DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009; Frank & Cannon, 2009; Goodrich & Luke, 2009; Stone, 2003). First, counselors can display GLB-affirmative posters, symbols, and signs in their offices (e.g., rainbow triangle, safe space or GLB ally sign). Second, counselors can educate themselves about GLB issues by reading books, journal articles, or information on GLB advocacy websites (e.g., Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network [GLSEN]), and by pursuing GLB-focused opportunities for continuing education. Third, counselors should start assembling a packet of local, regional, and national resources for youth who are GLB or questioning their sexual orientation. Resources could include pamphlets for students who are questioning their sexual orientation, books about the varying life experiences of GLB youth, and lists of websites of organizations that provide opportunities for social support or advocacy. Fourth, counselors should understand the importance of language and not use heterosexist language, which includes speaking in ways which do not presume heterosexuality and avoiding pejorative terms (e.g., "homosexual" and "that's so gay"). Fifth, counselors can advocate for youth by raising relevant GLB issues at faculty meetings, such as a need for school-wide training on intervening with homophobic bullying. Sixth, counselors can assist students with forming Gay-Straight Alliances and serve as
advisors to these student groups. Finally, counselors can confront heterosexist comments and behavior among students, faculty, and staff as unfair or unprofessional. Addressing anti-GLB comments or actions can be challenging; however, doing nothing implies that the counselor condones such comments or behavior.

**Recommendations for Counselor Educators.** The authors recommend infusing GLB issues and topics into pre-service school counseling training program curricula. Introductory counseling courses could include an overview of the ethical standards and legal duties of school counselors concerning sexual minority students (e.g., Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, First Amendment, and Equal Access Act of 1984; Matthews, 2005). Opportunities exist in counseling theory courses to incorporate sexual minority case studies, examples, and issues into discussions of counseling theories. Also, counselor educators could address the heterosexist bias evident in several counseling theories (Buhrke, 1989; Buhrke & Douce, 1991; Israel & Selvidge, 2003; Matthews, 2005). In addition, human development courses should cover GLB identity development and the coming-out process, GLB issues in family and peer relationships, and health and mental health disparities of sexual minority adolescents. Facilitating support groups for sexual minority youth could be integrated into group counseling courses (Buhrke & Douce, 1991; Matthews, 2005; Muller & Harrman, 1998; Whitman, 1995).

Furthermore, career counseling courses could address issues facing sexual minorities such as gay and lesbian stereotypes in relation to careers, lack of GLB role models in many careers, admission or hiring discrimination based on sexual orientation, homophobia in the workplace or on college campuses, non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies of colleges or businesses, and the existence of affirmative communities and services in college selection or job-related application (Buhrke, 1989; Buhrke & Douce, 1991; Croteau & Thiel, 1993; Elliott, 1993; Hetherington & Orzek, 1989; Matthews, 2005; Pope, 1995a; Pope et al., 2004).

Multicultural or cross-cultural counseling courses could include sexual minorities among other minority groups that are identified and studied (Buhrke, 1989; Israel & Selvidge, 2003; Matthews, 2005; Pope, 1995b). Counselor educators can provide an overview of the history of oppression of the GLB community. Trainees can also discuss the issues of multiple minority identities (e.g., African American lesbian) of youth (Buhrke, 1989; Buhrke & Douce, 1991; Matthews, 2005). Assessment and measurement courses may need to discuss the presence of heterosexist bias in assessment instruments and procedures and the influence of sexual orientation on counselors’ evaluation of students, as homosexuality has been historically pathologized (Buhrke, 1989; Buhrke & Douce, 1991; Matthews, 2005; Norton, 1982; Pope, 1992; Prince, 1997).

Opportunities also exist in practicum courses to provide trainees with role-playing scenarios of adolescent GLB issues, sexual minority case conceptualization exercises, steps to eliminate heterosexist language, and discussion of how heterosexist bias and homophobic attitudes negatively impact the counseling relationship and process. Throughout trainees’ practicum and internship experiences, counselor educators and supervisors should provide background information about GLB issues when appropriate, and address counselor bias and therapeutic issues involved in counseling sexual minority students. Just as counselor educators try to find trainees opportunities to gain experience working with racial/ethnic minorities, efforts to gain experience with sexual minorities should also be made. Counselor educators and supervisors can encourage and monitor trainees’ GLB cases for signs of heterosexist bias or homophobia (Buhrke, 1989; Buhrke & Douce, 1991; Isenzen, 1989; Israel & Selvidge, 2003; Matthews, 2005; Whitman, 1995). It is also important that trainees understand how to discriminate between deep-rooted psychopathology and transitory symptoms associated with GLB developmental tasks (e.g., coming out) or societal victimization (Allport, 1958) and assist students in coping and improving hostile environments (Buhrke, 1989; Buhrke & Douce, 1991; Isenzen, 1989; Israel & Selvidge, 2003). Also, school counselor trainees should have the option to take psychology, social work, or education courses with a specific focus on GLB populations as electives. Resources on GLB counseling competencies are available and essential in developing more comprehensive school counseling training programs (see Association for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Issues in Counseling, n.d.; Israel, Ketz, Detrie, Burke, & Shulman, 2003; Logan & Barret, 2003).

**Recommendations for School Administrators.** The authors recommend that administrators supply in-service training to school counselors that will raise awareness of issues facing GLB students and develop the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes for them to work competently with this unique population. These trainings are provided by some local and statewide nonprofit agencies and national organizations (e.g., American Psychological Association’s Healthy Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students Project, 2014; GLSEN, 2012; Safe Schools Coalition, 2013). Such trainings may include terminology and definitions concerning sexual orientation, common myths and stereotypes about GLB individuals, information and statistics about GLB mental health and school experiences, coming-out and identity development
models, anti-harassment laws and policies, video presentations on GLB students’ school experiences, homophobic bullying prevention and intervention, and discussion activities and role-playing scenarios. Ideally, all school personnel who regularly interact with and supervise students should receive training on GLB issues. The effectiveness and positive outcomes of such trainings have been empirically demonstrated (Dillon et al., 2004; Gilliland & Crisp, 1995; Israel & Hackett, 2004; Rudolf, 1989; Schneider & Tremble, 1986; Whitman, 1995; Whitman, Horn, & Boyd, 2007).

**Recommendations for Policymakers.** A final recommendation is for officials in state departments of education and school boards to include sexual orientation in professional education requirements for school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists. Specific educational requirements will help ensure that these professionals are prepared to counsel sexual minority students. Further lack of initiative and absence of action may leave GLB students and those questioning their sexual orientation without competent, supportive professionals within the educational system and for some students, prolonged struggles with mental health problems as well as hostile school environments. The authors believe it is the professional and ethical obligation of school counselors to provide appropriate and affirmative services to GLB students, and of counselor educators and school officials to equip these professionals with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to do so.

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**REFERENCES**


**Chapter 6: Sexual Minority Students**


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