Featured Research

Narratives of School Counselors Regarding Advocacy for LGBTQ Students

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Abstract

Using a directed form of qualitative research proposed by Mayring, this qualitative study applied Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to examine the efforts of nine self-identified school counselor advocates to advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) students. This study is warranted because LGBTQ students commonly experience bullying in the absence of resources while also trying to navigate a new identity. Findings indicated that the work expectations of other school stakeholders, along with the school counselors' levels of advocacy self-efficacy and exposure to the LGBTQ community, were related to how, when, and why the school counselors advocated for LGBTQ students. We offer future research and practice recommendations to give more voice to LGBTQ students in the current sociopolitical climate.

Keywords

advocacy, counselor, LGBTQ, qualitative research, school

Many school counselors identify themselves as "advocates," yet their perceived levels of advocacy for and with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) students vary (Simons, 2019). That is, their advocacy identity is perceived as incongruent with their actual advocacy efforts for this historically marginalized population. This perception is also related to a belief among some school counselors that LGBTQ students do not exist in some schools. As such, some may not challenge themselves to do anything different in order to meet the unique needs of LGBTQ students. Some may even flat out refuse to participate in research like this, a study focused on examining how self-identified school counselor advocates either do or do not assist LGBTQ students. This is concerning because 6–10% of the school population identify as LGBTQ (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2008). Definitions by the Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling (ALGBTIC, 2012) for the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning are below, with definitions for transgender, queer, and questioning:

- *Lesbian* is defined as a woman who is emotionally, physically, mentally, and/or spiritually oriented to bond and share affection with other women.
- *Gay* is defined as a man who is emotionally, physically, mentally, and/or spiritually oriented to bond and share affection with other men.
- *Bisexual* is defined as a man or woman who is emotionally, physically, mentally, and/or spiritually oriented to bond and share affection with both men and women.

- *Transgender* is defined as a person who has incongruent feelings during puberty between birth sex and self-identified gender, and the feelings are often experienced into adulthood (Kon, 2014). Transgender is also a term that encompasses other descriptors, including the term queer (Movement Advancement Project [MAP], 2017).
- *Queer* is defined as a person whose gender and/or sexual identity is not binary (i.e., it exists on a continuum ranging from male to female; ALGBTIC Transgender Committee, 2010). The term challenges binary thinking across multiple aspects of identity (e.g., sexuality, gender, and one's expression of them, which may or may not differ from social norms). Transgender and queer students, in particular, face higher levels of victimization on average than sexual minority and cisgender students (GLSEN, 2017).
- *Questioning* is one who is unsure if he, she, or they (i.e., male and female existing concurrently together) are emotionally, mentally, physically, and/or spiritually attracted to men, women, or both.

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Not all LGBTQ people, however, assign a label of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning to themselves. Although these terms are still used widely, researchers remind us that the terms continue to change because they are applied in the context of gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation, which do not always fit neatly into defined categories (American Psychological Association Division 44, 2014). In the present study, only one participant applied one of the aforementioned labels, lesbian, to herself. She was one of nine school counselors that the lead author contacted to participate in the study.

LGBTQ Students and Support

Many LGBTQ students report lack of validation and unclear expectations from educators about how to function in unsafe schools (Simons & Russell, 2019). More specifically, schools may not have policies that enumerate protections of gender identity/expression and sexual orientation (GLSEN, 2017). LGBTQ student support groups may not exist in schools, and teachers may not intervene when LGBTQ students are overlooked or harassed (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). Many LGBTQ students also lack support at home (Brummel & Sharp, 2010) and may carry high levels of guilt and shame tied to "coming out" (Dewitt, 2012). Subsequently, to cope, LGBTQ students may resort to drug or alcohol use and run away from home and school (Ream & Forge, 2014).

Also common to LGBTQ students is emotional distress (e.g., anxiety and depression) resulting from difficulty reconciling religious/spiritual values with one's sexual and/or gender minority identity. Distress also results from experiencing internalized stigma and forced participation in reparative therapies by parents/guardians (Goodrich & Luke, 2009). Examples of internalized stigma include internalized heterosexism and transphobia (Puckett & Levitt, 2015). These forms of stigma result when sexual and gender minority people internalize anti-homosexual, queer, and transgender attitudes. Reparative therapies posit that something is wrong within sexual minority students, and if that wrong is repaired (e.g., a man's past relationship with his mother or a woman's past relationship with father), same-gender attractions will end. Reparative therapies are not supported in the research and are banned for minors in 18 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (MAP, 2019), yet their use continues (Reitman et al., 2013).

School Counselors

School counselors are in a unique position to help LGBTQ students, yet some lack LGBTQ advocacy competence, similar to such a lack on the part of school administrators who may not effectively support school counselors in supporting LGBTQ students (Beck, Rausch, Wikoff, & Gallo, 2017). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has continued to prioritize publishing research on school counselor work with LGBTQ populations. Two editions of its flagship journal, *Professional School Counseling*, have been dedicated to counseling LGBTQ individuals. Now, researchers are empirically assessing factors associated with school counselor advocacy for LGBTQ students as an independent construct (Simons, 2018; Simons, Hutchison, & Bahr, 2017).

To ensure that LGBTQ students have a full range of access to the same resources and opportunities for academic and personal success as their heterosexual counterparts, school counselors from a variety of different schools should continue to participate in studies like this one. Ultimately, if we continue to learn more about school counselors' LGBTQ advocacy efforts, such efforts will occur more and schools will become safer (SIMONS, 2018). These schools also will be less vulnerable to lawsuits filed on behalf of LGBTQ students and their family members who claim that LGBTQ students were not given equal access to educational equity like that of heterosexual and cisgender students (Biegel, 2010).

Introduction to Study

We undertook this empirical, qualitative study to understand how and why high school counselors across several school settings advocated for LGBTQ students. We utilized the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 2015) to develop a semistructured interview protocol. All of the participating school counselors who claimed to assist LGBTQ students in their schools self-identified as "advocates." Thus, we coded the collected data using a rationale for initially restricting the narrative data to four TPB categories related to prediction and enactment of certain advocacy behaviors: (a) school counselors' attitudes, (b) advocacy self-efficacy, (c) expectations from others such as a principal (also referred to as subjective norm), and (d) school counselors' LGBTQ advocacy behavior plans (i.e., intentional plans to advocate; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Prior to the study and coding the data, we examined our biases.

Theory and Rationale

School counselors are expected to advocate for all students, including LGBTQ students (ASCA, 2012, 2016). Underlying this expectation is the belief that school counselors plan to or actually do this. This is troublesome because some do not and because marginalized LGBTQ students face higher levels of academic and social risk than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (GLSEN, 2017). Moreover, despite the defined role expectations of school counselors (ASCA, 2012; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008) and the passage of laws supporting same-gender marriage, the willingness of school counselors to successfully advocate for LGBTQ students varies (Simons, 2018). Therefore, we examined the

underpinnings of LGBTQ advocacy experiences of school counselors in light of the TPB.

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TPB

We developed the items for the interview protocol using the TPB (Ajzen, 2015). The theory posits that one's behavior or plan to perform that behavior stems from one's attitude toward the behavior, identity, self-efficacy, and subjective norm (e.g., expectations of others with regard to enacting particular behavior(s) or not). The TPB has been used to examine educational practices including school counseling (McCabe & Rubinson, 2008; Shipp, 2010; Simons et al., 2017).

Attitudes. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) define attitude as "a psychological tendency expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (p. 1). Attitudes held by certain societal subgroups underlie the existence of sociopolitical conflict (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). For example, depending on one's perspective, a person who favors same-gender marriage might be perceived as having a *positive attitude* toward the policy, while a person who does not favor same-gender marriage might be perceived as having a *negative attitude*.

Self-efficacy. According to Bandura, self-efficacy addresses self-judgments of personal capability (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Self-efficacy helps people to set goals and define beliefs about how well they will perform as they strive to meet goals for themselves and sometimes others (e.g., LGBTQ youth). Individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to be individuals who desire to master challenges and not avoid them.

Subjective norm. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) define subjective norm as a function of normative beliefs, that is, how others expect an individual to behave. For example, a school counselor's colleague may not think that the counselor should do anything to support LGBTQ students, but the school counselor's direct supervisor may think differently. As such, the supervisor may dictate what activities the school counselor should do to advocate for LGBTQ students.

Behavior plan. A behavior plan is defined as what a person will or will not do when engaging in a particular behavior such as LGBTQ advocacy (Simons, 2019). Having a behavior plan is a direct predictor of producing actual behavior. In other words, in the context of advocacy for LGBTQ students, a school counselor would develop a plan in advance to advocate for and with LGBTQ students and thus be more likely to intervene when harassment of LGBTQ students occurs in school (Simons, 2019). This may also include setting up an LGBTQ student club and giving presentations about sexual and gender minority issues with faculty, staff, students, and parents (Simons, 2018).

> *A school counselor who develops a plan in advance to advocate for and with LGBTQ students is more likely to intervene when harassment of LGBTQ students occurs.*

Advocacy for LGBTQ students. Behavior is an individual's observable action in a given situation. For example, in the context of advocacy for LGBTQ students, this might be how often a school counselor meets with LGBTQ students to talk to them about their school experiences and in what ways the school counselor works with or talks about the experiences of LGBTQ students (e.g., classroom lessons). Another example of advocacy in this area includes reviewing textbooks and consulting with teachers to discern whether or not LGBTQ issues are being taught (Lipkin, 1994; Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008). Thus, given the description above, the TPB was a reasonable theory to reference to develop interview items.

Method

Participants

Participants were nine counselors employed by high schools (three private, three public suburban, and three public urban) located in the Midwestern United States. Participants' ages ranged from 31 to 68 years ($M = 46$, $SD = 12$). In regard to sexual orientation and gender, eight participants identified as heterosexual and one participant identified as lesbian. Eight participants identified as White and one identified as African American. Two participants were tenured. All participants were employed full time, had experience working with LGBTQ students, and self-identified as advocates. The topic of school counselor advocacy for LGBTQ students was of interest to all of the interviewees. When participants have interest in a topic, the likelihood is greater that they will provide detailed and honest answers (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1956).

Interview Protocol

To examine participants' descriptions of school counselor advocacy for LGBTQ students in their respective school settings, we developed an interview protocol tied to the TPB categories. The first author conducted interviews, kept memos, and addressed biases about what was learned as the study progressed. After the first interview, we added an item to also examine the school counselors' experiences advocating for transgender students.

Table 1. Frequency of Data Tied to Theory of Planned Behavior Constructs.

Interview	1 (T.D.)	2 (M.C.)	3 (R.V.)	4 (P.K.)	5 (U.T.)	6 (U.T.2)	7 (D.F.)	8 (K.U.)	9 (V.V.)	Mean
Attitude	3	1	10	2	9	3	1	1	3	3.67
Subjective norm	20	11	16	7	31	18	14	16	10	15.89
Advocacy self-efficacy[a]	15	3	13	8	4	12	11	11	4	9.00
LGBTQ advocacy behavior plans	2	1	1	3	5	2	2	4	2	2.44
Actual LGBTQ advocacy[a]	9	2	12	3	18	7	12	11	2	8.44

Note. LGBTQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning.
[a]Participants talked about LGBTQ advocacy activities (or lack thereof) at nearly the same levels as LGBTQ advocacy self-efficacy.

Procedure

We sent e-mail announcements to recruit participants in a major Midwestern area. The announcements requested self-identified school counselor advocates to participate in a qualitative study of school counselor advocacy for and with LGBTQ students. Participants were informed of the study by reading e-mail recruitment messages online or hearing about the study from others. School counselors who communicated that they were interested in participating in the study received follow-up contact to schedule face-to-face interviews. School counselor participants signed an informed consent form before participating in interviews lasting 1–2 hr. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and data were coded using open and axial coding techniques in light of a directed phenomenological method. Directed methods require that codes are defined before and during data analysis; codes are derived from theory or relevant research findings (Mayring, 2000). For this study, coded data were restricted to each of the four TPB categories to allow calculation of the frequency and average occurrence of the narrative data. We also applied phenomenological theory (Smith & Osborne, 2008). As such, meaning of the school counselors' responses was identified from their response data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Data Analysis

Data analysis began after the first interview was completed. The process was started by the first author who has advanced training in qualitative research. He consulted with an expert qualitative researcher who holds a PhD in social welfare, regarding data gathered from the school counselors. Each of the interviews was coded with unique initials and the date and location of the interview. To make sense of the data for the purpose of the study question—What has LGBTQ school counselor advocacy looked like in schools and why has it occurred or not?—we consolidated, reduced, and interpreted data in light of themes tied to attitudes, self-efficacy, expectations of others, and LGBTQ advocacy behavior plans and recommended advocacy activities. We used a codebook to record data within emerging categories.

Procedures for Data Collection

The first author interviewed the participants at their workplace. He aimed to create a nonevaluative space for answering questions. He explained confidentiality and data storage, and that questions had no right or wrong answers. He asked the first question, "Tell me about yourself," to foster rapport prior to asking questions about sexual orientation. All interviews were recorded on a laptop using the software program MyMP3 2.0. Each participant completed a demographic form after signing the consent form. Prior to beginning the interviews, we developed an interview protocol with nine questions. We added a 10th question to the protocol after two interviews were conducted to assess for the number of students in each of the LGBTQ student subgroups in each school (e.g., number of lesbian students vs. number of transgender students). Last, we reviewed school web pages to see whether LGBTQ resources were in place, whether policies were inclusive of LGBTQ students, and to evaluate for proper use of school counseling language (i.e., the word guidance was no longer used to describe school counseling).

Findings

Each interviewee indicated certain attitudes (e.g., LGBTQ students should be given a safe space) and differing levels of advocacy self-efficacy, behavior plans, and actual advocacy, or lack thereof. The average frequency of this data for each of the TPB constructs across interviews is presented in Table 1.

Attitude

Although attitude was not the most prominent TPB construct participants discussed overall, it appeared the most influential construct in the work of interviewees R.V. and U.T. (see Table 1), both of whom were religious. R.V., employed in a public urban high school, mentioned religion 5 times throughout her interview, "We are going to deal with what the Lord and I can handle." She also reported, "the Holy Spirit I guess I have to say—led me to teaching and being a counselor," and "My mama taught me that from the grace of God (and I am not saying that I may switch over and start dressing this way or that way) but you don't ever put down anybody. . . . I would

work with anybody." U.T., who worked in a private, all-male Catholic high school, stated:

> No, the sexual orientation of, you know in the Catholic Church it is not recognized, so even though I personally do recognize it, I can sometimes be in conflict with the superior laws of our school. But we are given the freedom, quite honestly, we are given the freedom to handle those students in what we feel is the appropriate manner.

In addition to U.T., V.V., a counselor in a private, all-male, Catholic high school, shared:

> [Issues of sexuality and sexual orientation] have come up. I think in the culture of an all-male high school it is not one that is easily spoken about. Not only because it is all male, but also because it is Catholic ran. And, that is not an open or welcome topic to speak about in the Catholic Church. . . . I think there would be a level of uneasiness if someone spoke about homosexuality. It's, I mean it's clearly frowned upon by the Catholic Church. Every student takes a religion course every year . . . so if that were an issue for them, they would, I think, feel very uncomfortable in talking and discussing it in the school.

"Not only because it is all male, but also because it is Catholic ran . . . I think there would be a level of uneasiness if someone spoke about homosexuality. It's, I mean it's clearly frowned upon by the Catholic Church." Participant V.V.

As all of the participants did, V.V. also spoke about the influence of subjective norm in her high school. This disclosure was mainly tied to the influence of the Marianist administrators and teachers who did not display interest in having V.V., and her school counselor colleagues develop or utilize specialized programming for LGBTQ students. She shared:

> I think in any environment, you respond to how the leader of your school responds, so if your principal is OK with living in the nineties, that's where the school is going to remain. [However], if you're dealing with somebody who wants change and is always wanting kids to aspire to have the most challenging . . . that's the vibe you get from the top then [the] whole school responds to them. And the principal who was here last year who hired me . . . was okay with staying where we were.

Subjective Norm

Subjective norm was the most frequent TPB category examined across all participants (Table 1). The school counselors were more apt to talk about external factors—tied to the expectations of others with regard to their advocacy for LGBTQ students—than intrapersonal factors such as attitudes and advocacy self-efficacy. Subjective norm was identified prominently in the areas of administrative and student influence on school

counselors' levels of LGBTQ advocacy. More specifically, the views and actions of administration and students were closely monitored by the school counselor advocates such as V.V. when they were deciding on how and when to advocate for and with LGBTQ students.

LGBTQ Advocacy Self-Efficacy

Advocacy self-efficacy was the second most prominent TPB category (see Table 1). The interview with M.C. yielded the lowest frequency count in this area. Her interview gave the impression that she did not have much control to make changes in the school, either for or on behalf of LGBTQ students. M.C., who was passionate about serving others and worked in a public, urban high school that prioritized academic counseling and did not provide inclusive sex education, said:

> We don't get to talk much about sexual issues. We are so focused on academics and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Without additional help, we don't do much more. Only because my intern is here and she hotlined a student because he had been on a website, we found he identifies as bisexual.

To the contrary, Maslow (1954) has proposed one's sexuality as part of the physiological foundation necessary for self-actualization. It sets the stage for friendship, family, and sexual intimacy. In light of this, V.V. recommended that schools begin to offer inclusive sex education so that faculty effectively communicate with students who are unsure of their sexual orientation, make the students feel comfortable, and help the students manage their feelings, which can turn suicidal (Russell, 2003). V.V. further shared:

> I think there's a level of fear, that is, if they're sitting next to someone who has a different orientation, there's something wrong with that person because that's what they've been taught. They're fearful of them [even though] there's not something genetically wrong with them.

The level of participants' advocacy self-efficacy appeared to be related to their level of exposure to the LGBTQ community (e.g., having a gay brother, sponsoring an LGBTQ group, or being lesbian). These experiences had a greater impact than additional training or coursework in the absence of LGBTQ people. Two interviews, one with P.K. and another with T.D., garnered more data in this area. P.K., a White heterosexual male in a public, suburban, alternative high school, met more gay and lesbian people over time. He shared:

The level of participants' advocacy self-efficacy appeared to be related to their level of exposure to the LGBTQ community.

> You know, it is just something that I have just come around [to]. It has been a long struggle. I think in '65 when I have started, even in

the early '70s, I would have been very uncomfortable advocating for gay and lesbian students. I wouldn't be that uncomfortable any more. I still have to fight my demons, the way that I have been brought up.

T.D., a White lesbian high school counselor who worked in a public, urban performing arts high school and was active in her local LGBTQ community, had experiences that were related to her level of LGBTQ advocacy self-efficacy, and felt confident advocating for LGBTQ students. When asked about her choice to be open professionally about being LGBTQ, she responded:

> I was. I made a very conscious decision, a difficult decision in realizing that I could have lost my job in a rather conservative district even though as employees we have protection. Sexual orientation, we are a protected class, but culturally we are not protected.

T.D. also talked about an experience she had when she was in training:

> I was actually told by a professor that I had that I would never be able to be an out educator and work in the schools, that we just were not there yet. And my response was that if I could not be who I was, I was doing a disservice to the students. How could we let them know that it is okay to be who they are but yet deny or lie about who we were? And I said I'll take my chances. And, I can remember that distinctly, having that conversation and she said it will never happen.

LGBTQ Advocacy Behavior

Participants talked about their own LGBTQ advocacy activities (or lack thereof) in schools nearly as much as they talked about their levels of LGBTQ advocacy self-efficacy (Table 1). Of the participants, M.C. (3), P.K. (2), and V.V. (9) spoke about LGBTQ advocacy behaviors the least. M.C. and V.V. did not know about the views of their administrations concerning LGBTQ students, and they believed that it would be difficult for them to advocate for LGBTQ students in their schools because they had limited resources and knowledge. P.K. reported having less self-reported LGBTQ advocacy self-efficacy than M.C. and claimed that there was a need for an LGBTQ student group in his school, but it did not exist.

Identification of advocacy behaviors for and with LGBTQ students was a major theme, whether or not the school counselors were actually initiating the behaviors. Participants identified the following recommendations for school counselors. They should (a) be visible (e.g., put "Safe Zone" stickers on classroom and office doors after receiving training); (b) offer particular services, including referrals to community resources such as social workers; (c) establish protocol for following up on reports of LGBTQ harassment; (d) gain knowledge of laws; (e) sponsor or help to establish a student group; (f) display particular dispositions; (g) be involved with LGBTQ matters in the school; (h) offer travel and volunteer programs specific to LGBTQ students; (i) recognize personal and professional limitations; (j) advocate for all students; (k) implement comprehensive school counseling; and (l) effectively affirm LGBTQ students and allies—regardless of school setting. R.V., U.T., U.T.2, and D.F. all mentioned working to give students voice. U.T. provided one unique example of an approach used with LGBTQ students, described below.

Instead of advocating for LGBTQ students at the school and community levels, because effectively he could not do so without being fired, U.T. intentionally advocated at the individual level with LGBTQ students in his high school. He decided to facilitate an activity, Man in the Glass, using a mirror on the wall. When working with LGBTQ students, he would ask them to look into the mirror and ask themselves, "Am I living an authentic life?" He shared that this activity is about having students become honest with themselves despite having the choice to fool others, because, at some point, they will have to decide whether or not to accept themselves. The next step of this activity is to have students interview themselves as they work toward becoming more assertive and confident regardless of the opinions of other people, including their classmates and other school stakeholders. In this process, students should give special attention to their appearance, body language, and knowledge of self (Carnegie, 2004). For school counselors, knowledge about the successes of the LGBTQ community is helpful information to teach to all students, regardless of background and sexual orientation (Lipkin, 1994).

Discussion and Conclusion

An effective way to examine school counselor LGBTQ advocacy is via social psychological theory (Simons et al., 2017). Several themes emerged from this study, with three being pronounced: (a) subjective norm of a school is related to whether or not school counselors plan to or actually advocate for LGBTQ students (i.e., the expectations of different school stakeholders either stymie or foster how LGBTQ issues are addressed in schools), (b) advocacy self-efficacy is related to school counselors' experiences with and exposure to the LGBTQ community as a whole, and (c) effective LGBTQ school counselor advocates know-how, when, and where to implement particular LGBTQ advocacy tasks in order to affirm their LGBTQ students while not getting fired. As such, school counselor LGBTQ advocacy can be done in any type of school, whether LGBTQ students are validated in that school or not.

V.V. recommended that school counselors in her school and other schools meet with their principals to communicate about each other's expectations and resources for LGBTQ students. This supports the work of Beck, Rausch, Wikoff, and Gallo

(2017), who also called for more school counselors and principals to collaborate. V.V. stated her belief that more LGBTQ people coming out in education is highly unlikely; however, she hopes more people will and that they will serve as role models. She said, "I don't think we're going to see the day where you'll have someone stand in front of an all-school assembly and declare their orientation, but I know that when you work with teenagers, you should never say never."

Having LGBTQ role models in schools may allow more educators, including school counselors, to learn about the personhood of LGBTQ people (Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010). In turn, this increased awareness may help more school counselors demonstrate higher levels of school counselor LGBTQ advocacy (Simons, 2018) rather than school counselors pursuing specialized training.

Limitations

Although the responses that the participants shared created a very thoughtful pool of data to study, the number of participants in the study was small ($N = 9$). Therefore, generalizability of findings is limited, but this study initiated research into the existence and mechanisms of school counselor LGBTQ advocacy (i.e., advocacy by school counselors on behalf of LGBTQ students). The project has set the stage for more research—in this emerging research area—with a larger and more diverse sample of school counselors to provide a clearer perspective of what LGBTQ advocacy looks like.

Self-selection bias may have also been present in this study. As such, participants may have held certain views or had certain experiences (e.g., more LGBTQ advocacy experiences) that increased their likelihood of participating in the study. Conversely, those who did not know about nor participate in the study may have had other views or experiences that would have been valuable to examine. These conditions of where school counselors were employed, small sample size, and self-selection bias limit the generalizability of data. However, the study focus was not on generalizability but on examining the meaning of LGBTQ advocacy experiences in light of social psychological theory. Findings from the data gathered from school counselors who self-identified as advocates for LGBTQ students serve as an initial discussion of how to further improve the school experiences of LGBTQ youth and emerging adults despite the school settings in which they are enrolled.

Future Research

This was an initial attempt to understand advocacy for LGBTQ high school students. These nine interviews have offered a better understanding of school counselor advocacy in this emerging research area. This study also clarifies similarities and variation in school counselors' experiences working with LGBTQ students. To advance this study, researchers could interview and survey a larger sample of school counselors (e.g., up to 20) about their educational background and training related to LGBTQ issues. Action research also should be conducted with school educators, LGBTQ people, and allies who are developing and implementing affirmative LGBTQ programming to use in schools. An example of this for private schools is *Addressing LGBT Issues with Youth: A Resource for Educators*, developed by a committee of the Marianist community in 2015 and available at http://www.msjc.net/portfolio/lgbt-team.

Further research could be conducted with semistructured interviews or with focus groups. Spreading interviews over more than one meeting time and including perspectives from other school stakeholders, such as principals, teachers, and students, might also be advantageous to triangulate findings, especially in schools where there is limited to no discussion about empowering LGBTQ students or oversight about how this done (e.g., diocesan vs. nondiocesan schools). Discussion about LGBTQ issues appears to often be lacking among school counselors and other school stakeholders who do not feel supported or encouraged to advocate for LGBTQ students.

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