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Article 45

Best Practices for School Counselors Working With Transgender Students

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Abstract

Transgender students often feel unsafe in schools and experience harassment, depression, and other mental health issues. School counselors play a vital role in supporting and advocating for all students, especially students who identify as transgender. The purpose of this article is to discuss recent literature related to working with transgender youth and to outline the best practices for school counselors when working with transgender students based upon a multiculturally competent framework. School counselors should be aware of and explore their attitudes as they relate to transgender students. Knowing ethical and legal obligations and using sensitive and inclusive language are imperative in working with transgender students. Additionally, developing skill sets and utilizing best practices that are supportive and inclusive are crucial in working with transgender students. With the growing transgender population and the continual development of legislation concerning transgender individuals, it is important that school counselors be competent and prepared to work with transgender students.

Keywords: school counselors; transgender; best practices

Transgender youth are one of the most vulnerable and at-risk populations for experiencing harassment and mental health issues, including depression or thoughts of suicide. Eighty-seven percent of transgender youth reported facing verbal harassment and two thirds reported feeling unsafe at school (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009). Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, and Azrael (2009) reported that one in four transgender youth described a previous suicide attempt and attributed that attempt to being transgender. Despite these alarming statistics, little research exists regarding preparing school counselors to work with transgender youth.

The exact number of transgender youth in schools is uncertain, and there is a scarcity of research regarding this number. Grossman and D'Augelli (2006) argued that reasons for this include that transgender youth are afraid to publicize their identity due to potential harassment and discrimination they may face in school. A recent study demonstrated that the U.S. adult transgender population has nearly doubled from 2011 to 2016 (Flores, Herman, Gates, & Brown, 2016). With celebrities, such as Caitlin Jenner, publicly identifying as transgender, and recent television show debuts, such as *I am Cait* and *I am Jazz*, transgender issues are receiving public attention. The sociopolitical climate is changing with the recent exposure to and publicizing of transgender issues, allowing more individuals who identify as transgender to come forward.

As this population continues to grow, legislation and policies need to be developed to protect transgender individuals. Unfortunately, some states are using this legislation to further oppress transgender populations, such as the North Carolina House Bill 2 that passed in March 2016, forcing transgender persons to use restrooms that match their sex assigned at birth. This law also directly affects students, as the bill requires them "to use public school restrooms and locker rooms based on the gender on their birth certificates" (Gordon, Price, & Peralta, 2016). With the growing transgender population and the continual development of legislation concerning transgender individuals, it is imperative that school counselors be prepared and competent to worth with transgender students. The purpose of this article is to discuss recent literature related to working with transgender youth and to outline the best practices for school counselors when working transgender students.

Literature Review

Part of the reason there is a dearth of literature surrounding transgender issues in school counseling is because people often confuse sexual orientation with gender identity (DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009) or they lump them all together (i.e., LGBTQ). The core phenomenon of individuals who identify as transgender is their gender identity; while the core phenomenon of individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning is sexual orientation or attraction. These are two different phenomena but in terms of research, they are often combined.

After an extensive review of the literature, I found no study analyzing school counselors' competency working with transgender students. However, O'Hara, Dispenza, Brack, and Blood (2013) studied counselors-in-training—master's, specialist, and doctoral students—and examined their competency in working with transgender individuals. They did not specify if the participants were studying clinical mental health, school counseling, marriage and family, and so forth. No assessment existed to measure

competency with the transgender population, so O'Hara et al. modified the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale to form the Gender Identity Counselor Competency Scale (GICCS). They distributed the survey to 87 participants and found that there was no significant difference between the beginning and advanced students on ratings of competence nor was there a significant difference between individuals who completed practicum or internship versus those who did not. Knowing someone personally who was transgender did have a significant effect on GICCS scores.

The findings from O'Hara et al.'s (2013) study are concerning because neither level of training nor practical experience seemed to make a difference in preparation of counselors-in-training to work with transgender individuals. This is especially troubling since the American Counseling Association (ACA; 2010) has outlined competencies for counseling transgender clients, signifying the importance of adequate preparation for all counselors. Based on these competencies, Gonzalez and McNulty (2010) identified four strategies for school counselors to become competent through advocacy for transgender students.

The first strategy outlined by Gonzalez and McNulty (2010) was using effective messaging to clearly communicate and address the concerns of transgender students with faculty, staff, and other key stakeholders. They outlined seven necessary steps to assist with clear communication: 1) know your audience; 2) identify mutual interests; 3) share a personal story; 4) be cognizant of language; 5) develop a main point and supporting ideas; 6) reframe the conversation when derailed; and 7) prepare responses for potential barriers or opposing views. The researchers derived the seven steps from consulting with colleagues and from their own personal experiences of advocating for transgender youth.

Gonzalez and McNulty (2010) reported creating a safe environment that allows students to be empowered is the second advocacy strategy. School counselors can help foster an environment of safety and inclusion by sponsoring school-based clubs that support LGBT youth, such as the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), and by advocating for inclusive school policies such as gender-neutral bathrooms. The third strategy included school counselors educating other staff by delivering professional development. The training should include key issues affecting transgender students, terminology, and school policies. The fourth strategy outlined by Gonzalez and McNulty included school counselors working with ally organizations to advocate on a community and legislative level. Additionally, school counselors should have a list of community and referral resources available for transgender students and their families.

Ethical Considerations

The *ACA Code of Ethics* outlines several professional values that are central to the field. Counselors are charged with promoting social justice, and "honoring diversity and embracing a multicultural approach in support of worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts (ACA, 2014, p. 3). A similar principle is outlined for those counselors working in the school systems. The *American School Counselor Association Ethical Standards for School Counselors* (ASCA; 2016) guides the practice, problem solving, and decision making of school counselors. This ethical code outlines rights held by all students, including the right to:

> Be respected, be treated with dignity and have access to a comprehensive school counseling program that advocates for and affirms all students from diverse

> populations including but not limited to: ethnic/racial identity, nationality, age, social class, economic status, abilities/disabilities, language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression, family type, religious/spiritual identity, emancipated minors, wards of the state, homeless youth and incarcerated youth. School counselors as social-justice advocates support students from all backgrounds and circumstances. (ASCA, 2016, p. 1)

The ASCA standards address the school counselor's obligation to students by further stating in code A.10.e that it is the school counselor's responsibility to "understand that students have the right to be treated in a manner consistent with their gender identity and to be free from any form of discipline, harassment or discrimination based on their gender identity or gender expression" (ASCA, 2016, p. 4).

Theoretical Framework

The tripartite model of multicultural counseling competence, which includes counselors' attitudes, knowledge, and skills, was utilized in this article as a framework for establishing best practices for school counselors when working with transgender students. The framework was first discussed by Sue et al. (1982) in the commissioned paper by the American Psychological Association's president Allen Ivey, followed by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis' (1992) discussion of multicultural counseling competencies. Having these competencies meant a counselor possessed the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to work with diverse racial and ethnic minority groups. Today, those competencies have been expanded to include diverse populations outside of race and ethnicity. Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, and Bryant (2007) defined multicultural competence as, "the extent to which counselors possess appropriate levels of self-awareness, knowledge, and skills in working with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds" (p. 24). Diverse cultural backgrounds include any variable in which a counselor and client may differ, including but not limited to the following categories outlined in the *ACA Code of Ethics*, Section C.5, *Discrimination* (2014): "age, culture, disability, ethnicity, race, religion/spirituality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital/ partnership status, language preference, socioeconomic status, immigration status or any basis proscribed by law" (p. 9).

Attitudes

The first step in working with transgender students is to become aware of one's current attitudes toward this population. According to Byrd and Hays (2012), inaccurate information and anti-transgender ideas and beliefs permeate our society and affect everyone in many different ways. In order to become an ally, advocate, or competent school counselor, school counselors must become aware of and unlearn any potential biases or stereotypes they may have about transgender individuals.

Byrd and Hays (2012) adapted an activity found in GLSEN's Safe Space Training kit (2013) to utilize in exploring one's attitudes when working with the LGBTQ population. The activity, described below, was adapted further to explore attitudes when working with transgender students:

> Take a moment and think back as far as you can about some early messages you received as a child, adolescent, or adult about transgender individuals. They could

have been covert, overt, unnoticed, or misunderstood at the time. They could have been positive, negative, or even neutral. Spend a few minutes thinking about these memories. Write down some of your recollections, then consider the following questions:

1. To what extent have I internalized the messages I received about transgender individuals?
2. To what extent do I agree with the messages I received?
3. To what extent do I disagree with the messages I received?
4. Spend some time thinking about and possibly identifying some stereotypes about transgender individuals that could have been formed from early experiences.
5. To what extent do these messages, beliefs, and/or biases play a role in the therapeutic relationship?
6. How do my biases and/or stereotypes affect my ability to act as a competent and ethical school counselor?
7. How can I work to unlearn these biases and stereotypes as I seek to serve a diverse population? (Byrd & Hays, 2012)

The intention of this activity is for school counselors to begin to understand where their attitudes, positive or negative, developed. Awareness is the first step in being able to overcome those faulty beliefs about transgender individuals. One way to begin changing attitudes and undoing stereotypes that society often teaches is to gain education and knowledge about transgender individuals. A resource that highlights the lived experiences of transgender individuals and their identity development processes is the PBS documentary *Growing Up Trans* (Navasky & O'Connor, 2015).

An additional strategy for changing faulty attitudes or beliefs towards transgender individuals is exposure. O'Hara et al. (2013) found that knowing someone personally who was transgender was one of the only variables that had a significant effect on competency scores for counseling transgender clients. If a school counselor does not know someone personally who identifies as transgender, then attending a social event, protest, religious service, etc. with a transgender population is a suggested first step in getting to know people who identify as transgender.

Knowledge of Law and Language

The second aspect of multicultural competence is knowledge. Three key components of knowledge emerge whenever discussing transgender issues. One component is ethics (which was previously discussed), the second is law, and the third is language.

Law. The ACA and ASCA ethical codes and standards outline the stance of the professional organizations and those governed by those organizations; counselors are required to not only adhere to their ethical standards, but also to the state and federal laws under which they practice. In addition to the ethical considerations previously discussed, Title IX, The Equal Access Act, the National Education Association's (NEA) *Code of Ethics*, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 1st Amendment, and

14th Amendment are important legislation to consider whenever working with transgender individuals.

Under Title IX, sex discrimination is prohibited in any federally funded education program activity. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), sex discrimination as outlined by Title IX includes "a student's transgender status" and "makes clear that both federal agencies [U.S. Department of Education and Justice] treat a student's gender identity as the student's sex for purposes of enforcing Title IX" (para. 3). This guidance outlined by the U.S. Department of Education (2016) goes on to explain the school's obligation to: (a) respond to sex-based harassment, including that based on actual or perceived gender; (b) treat students consistent with their gender identity regardless of sex listed in school records; (c) "allow students to participate in sex-segregated activities and access sex-segregated facilities consistent with their gender identity" (para. 9); and (d) protect the privacy of the student regarding their transgender status. Within this guidance, it is also made clear that schools can provide additional options for privacy, and that students are not required to use shared bathrooms or changing spaces when other options are available.

The Equal Access Act (1984) states that all school-affiliated organizations, like Gay-Straight Alliance, are treated equally compared to other clubs. Schools cannot ban certain types of groups or single them out. This act applies to any secondary schools that receive federal funds.

Another important legal concept to consider is confidentiality. Jacobs (2013) referenced the NEA *Code of Ethics*, which states that an educator will "not disclose information about students obtained in the course of professional service unless disclosure serves a compelling professional purpose or is required by law" (NEA, 1975, I.8). Additionally, FERPA protects students' personal information contained in school records and cannot be released without permission.

Two amendments from the United States Constitution are important to know when counseling transgender students. The 1st Amendment protects the right of students to free speech and freedom of expression. This freedom of expression extends to include expression of one's gender identity. Additionally, the 14th Amendment may also offer protection from discrimination for transgender students. Jacobs (2013) stated, "The 14th amendment has been the basis for lawsuits against school districts involving discrimination against LGBT students and for failure to provide equal protection from harassment for LGBT youth when compared to non-LGBT classmates" (p. 106). While Jacobs (2013) discussed important cases concerning the 14th Amendment, all of the individuals involved were discriminated against based upon sexual orientation and not gender identity or expression. It will be important for school counselors to be cognizant and aware of any future case that may inform case law involving a transgender student's protection under the 14th Amendment.

Since public education is a state matter, it is imperative that school counselors know their specific state's legislation concerning transgender students. One prominent example concerning transgender students is dealing with the use of bathrooms and locker rooms. Many states are currently reviewing legislation related to transgender issues, specifically concerning bathroom use. It is crucial that school counselors know this legislation and advocate for the passing of legislation that is both safe and inclusive for transgender students, as it will impact public school policy. Additionally, most states

have passed anti-bullying laws (Jacobs, 2013); school counselors should know their state-specific anti-bullying laws and ensure they are being enforced with fidelity on their school campuses.

Language. Using appropriate, correct, and affirming language is imperative for school counselors when working with transgender students (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Goodrich, Harper, Luke, & Singh, 2013; Singh & Burnes, 2009). The appendix contains a list of terminology with which school counselors should become familiar. One of the most important things for school counselors to understand is the concept of gender. Transgender is an umbrella term that can include individuals who identify in many different ways. Some of those ways include agender, gender fluid, and genderqueer (Human Rights Campaign, 2016). It is important to note that only an individual can self-identify as transgender and cannot be given that label by others (Lamba Legal and National Youth Advocacy Coalition, 2008). Gender has a social construction aspect to it, and, oftentimes, the concept of gender includes others dictating or suggesting what it means to be a male, female, etc. (Singh, Boyd, & Whitman, 2010). Therefore, it is imperative for students to be able to self-identify as their chosen gender and what it means to them.

Additionally, inclusive language should be used not only when addressing a transgender student but also in educational policies, school forms, curriculum, and instructional materials (Goodrich et al., 2013). One example that demonstrates this is the gender designation on most school forms. The options given are most commonly male and female. The best practice for forms is to make the gender category response open-ended, allowing students and their families to answer as they deem appropriate versus being forced to make a choice that may not be representative of their gender identity. If delineated categories are necessary due to coding for data collection purposes, then they should include at the very minimum the following options: male, female, transgender, nonbinary, gender fluid, genderqueer, agender, and an option to self-describe (Human Rights Campaign, 2016).

Asking a student by which name and pronouns they would like to be called may also be appropriate; however, a school counselor must first assess whether the student has disclosed their gender identity to others at school or at home and ask the student's permission before publicly addressing the student by the disclosed name and pronouns. The student may request that the school counselor address the student by their chosen name and pronouns only in the confidential setting of the counselor's office. A school counselor should recognize and be sensitive to a student's request considering whether or not the student has disclosed their gender identity to friends, other students, staff, and/or parents.

Best Practices

The third area of Sue et al.'s (1982) tripartite model of multicultural competence is skills. School counselors are required to take action to create a safe and inclusive environment for transgender students. These skills, or best practices, include creating inclusive policies and procedures, curriculum, and co-curricular activities (GLSEN, 2013; Goodrich et al., 2013). Students from the transgender community should also have a visible presence on campus through both the school's physical environment and inclusivity when it comes to school events. Additionally, educating staff on issues

transgender students may face and how to support these students is an important area of skill development. The last action area for school counselors is to be competent in providing resources and interventions—school-wide, group, and individual—to trans students.

Policies and procedures. Policies and procedures should also be inclusive and supportive of transgender students. While this may be one of the most sensitive and controversial areas surrounding transgender students, schools should have gender neutral bathrooms or locker rooms, or allow transgender students to use the bathroom or locker room of the gender with which they identify (Lamba Legal, n.d.). However, schools should consult with transgender students concerning this issue. Trans students may want to use the bathroom of the gender with which they identify but may not feel comfortable due to other students' comments or action. Assumptions should not be made concerning trans students' bathroom and locker room preferences, but instead trans students should be included in deciding what is the safest and most comfortable choice.

Since 55.2% of students reported experiencing verbal harassment, 22.7% experienced physical harassment, and 11.4% experienced physical assault due to their gender expression (Kosciw, Greytak, Boesen, & Palmer, 2014), fairly enforced non-discrimination and anti-bullying and harassment policies that explicitly protect trans students should exist. Every student should be notified of the policy either through orientation or the student code of conduct or handbook. Additionally, parents of students should also be made aware of these policies. Goodrich et al. (2013) discussed the case of *Doe v. Bellefonte Area School District* (2004) and noted that it as an exemplary case of how school administration should handle discipline issues relating to gender-nonconforming victims of harassment. When the school was made aware of the harassment they responded immediately. The school personnel held the harassers responsible for their actions. Then they notified all faculty and staff of the harassment and recruited them to help prevent further incidents. The school also held school-wide assemblies and set up policies to address peer-to-peer harassment. Additionally, the victim was provided with a unique way to report harassment to further protect the student's safety.

Another way to ensure inclusivity and safety for transgender students is through dress code policies. A gender neutral dress code, such as a standard uniform shirt and bottoms for all students, is a way to allow trans students to not feel singled out or distinguishable based upon dress (GLSEN, 2013). If a school does not offer a standardized dress code, then allowing transgender students to dress according to their identified gender is crucial.

Another area to consider regarding inclusive language for transgender students is school forms and applications (Goodrich et al., 2013). Most school forms and documents, especially registration and health forms, include a gender category. Jones et al. (2014) argued that the best practice for school forms is making the gender category open-ended, allowing parents and students to complete it as they wish versus a forced choice, which usually only includes male and female. In addition to the gender category, forms and applications should also be inclusive of all family structures and not just traditional mother and father family structures (GLSEN, 2013).

School safety begins with appropriate policy development and implementation. In 2016, GLSEN and the National Center for Transgender Equality released a revised model

district policy designed to help school districts in the development of safe and inclusive best practices. The sample model addresses the issues of: (a) bullying, harassment, and discrimination; (b) privacy/confidentiality; (c) media and community communication; (d) names, pronouns, and school records; (e) access to gender-segregated activities and facilities; (f) dress code; (g) student transitions; and (h) training and professional development. GLSEN's sample model provides school districts with a starting point with which to build local policy by addressing key points and policy objectives (GLSEN/National Center for Transgender Equality, 2015).

Visibility of transgender students. Increasing the visibility of transgender students through the school's physical environment and inclusion at school events is an additional way to create a safe and inclusive environment for transgender students. Displaying inclusive signs may include GLSEN's Safe Space sign, indicating that areas, such as the school counselor's office, are safe spaces for trans students to seek support (GLSEN, 2013; Ratts et al., 2013). The sign can be printed for free from GLSEN's Safe Space kit, downloadable at http://www.glsen.org/safespace. Additionally, signs that are found in classrooms and public spaces, such as the hallways, library or cafeteria, should be inclusive of diverse student populations, as well showing support for LGBTQ students.

School events are another area in which schools need to be inclusive of transgender students (GLSEN, 2013). One of the events garnering the most attention concerning LGBT students is the school dance. Not only should school dances, such as prom and homecoming, be safe and inclusive for all students, but consideration to gender-neutral alternatives to "King" and "Queen" should be given. At the minimum, a transgender student should be permitted to run for the position that corresponds to their gender identity. Schools should also be inclusive of trans students when it comes to using student volunteers at assemblies or as ambassadors who may welcome and take guests on campus tours. Including transgender students in assemblies where visitors may be present or as ambassadors and student leaders indicates to the community that transgender students are welcome and including at this school.

Curriculum. Regarding inclusiveness, school personnel also need to address educational curriculum (GLSEN, 2013; Goodrich et al., 2013). GLSEN (2013) suggested that health and sexuality education, library resources, and course materials that address transgender issues and history should be infused into a school's curriculum. Additionally, Singh and Burnes (2009) stated that integrating media and books into classes is another way to help transgender students feel supported by their school community. One important note is that when incorporating trans issues into curricula, educators need to ensure they are developmentally appropriate for students. GLSEN has both lesson plans and other educational curriculum resources located on its Web site, which are broken down into elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Curriculum choices can either foster or inhibit a school climate that is inclusive of all students, including youth who are transgender or gender nonconforming. Thein (2013) conducted a study to determine why some language arts teachers were willing to teach using LGBT texts and others were not. Participant responses included several concerns including "I would but I don't know how." The author noted that educators concerned with how to appropriately implement inclusive curriculum can benefit from observing those already doing so. "In order for teachers to begin to see how the work of teaching

LGBT texts and issues might be accomplished, they need to see examples of real teachers doing ally-work and successfully teaching LGBT texts and issues in their classrooms" (Thein, 2013, p. 179). The more teachers continue to focus on inclusive curriculum, the easier it will be to find ways to incorporate a variety of materials and texts across the content areas.

Co-curricular activities. GLSEN (2013) suggested that schools need to ensure that co-curricular activities, such as athletics and clubs, are inclusive of transgender students. Mahoney, Dodds, and Polsaek (2015) reported that California paved the way for athletic policies that allow transgender students to compete with teams consistent with their gender identity through The School Success and Opportunity Act. It states that "A pupil shall be permitted to participate in sex-segregated school programs and activities, including athletic teams and competitions, and use facilities consistent with his or her gender identity, irrespective of the gender listed on the pupil's records" (California Education Code §221.5, para. 8). Other co-curricular activities, such as the school yearbook or newspaper, should include publications covering trans people and issues. Additionally, student-run clubs, such as the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) or No Place for Hate should be established in order to help establish a safe, welcoming environment for trans students.

Almost all of the aforementioned skills, or best practices, require collaboration and coordination among administrative staff. School counselors are key in advocating for transgender issues and inclusivity in schools. School counseling is a unique and special position that allows transgender students to confide in someone in a safe and confidential environment. Additionally, unlike most other administrative positions, advocating for marginalized students, such as transgender students, is a fundamental responsibility of school counselors (Stone, 2003).

Educating staff. One major way for school counselors to advocate for trans students is to educate other staff (GLSEN, 2013; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Singh & Burnes, 2009). The Gay-Straight Alliance Network/Tides Center, Transgender Law Center, and National Center for Lesbian Rights' (2004) toolkit outlines a presentation to give staff working with transgender students, which includes review of statistics, myths and facts, definitions, and issues transgender students face. Singh and Burnes (2009) suggested educating faculty and staff about transgender-specific language and discussing issues that are specific to transgender students such as bullying and bathroom use.

In the model district policy published provided by GLSEN/The National Center for Transgender Equality (2016), it is recommended that districts implement ongoing professional development with topics including, but not limited to:

> (i) terms, concepts, and current developmental understandings of gender identity, gender expression, and gender diversity in children and adolescents;
>
> (ii) developmentally appropriate strategies for communication with students and parents about issues related to gender identity and gender expression that protect student privacy;
>
> (iii) developmentally appropriate strategies for preventing and intervening in bullying incidents, including cyberbullying;
>
> (iv) classroom-management practices, curriculum, and resources that educators can integrate into their classrooms to help foster a more gender-inclusive

environment for all students; and

(v) school and district policies regarding bullying, harassment, discrimination, and suicide prevention and responsibilities of staff.

Whole-school, group and individual interventions and resources. In addition to advocating for inclusive and supportive school-wide policies and procedures, school counselors can also make an impact in the lives of transgender students in ways that are more specific to their roles. School counselors should infuse transgender issues into their school counseling curricula, including classroom lessons and school-wide programming. Singh and Burnes (2009) reported that infusing trans issues into school guidance curriculum could demonstrate to students the importance of being allies and observing transgender culture. Ideas for classroom presentations include education surrounding gender identity and expression and anti-bullying lessons. The Safe Schools Coalition (2013) compiled a comprehensive list of lesson plans organized into elementary, middle, and high school appropriate plans that can be found at http://www.safeschools coalition.org/RG-lessonplans.html.

Additional programming that is supportive of transgender students includes special culture days or weeks. These include Day of Silence, Ally Week, and No Name-Calling Week. These are nationwide celebrations and the dates can be found at GLSEN.org. The GLSEN Day of Silence (GLSEN, n.d.) is a student-led national event in which middle school, high school, and college students take a vow of silence illustrating the silencing effect that bullying and harassment has on LGBT students. More resources and information for Ally and No Name-Calling Week can be found at GLSEN.org.

Sponsoring clubs, such as GSA, is an additional way school counselors can support transgender students. Griffin, Lee, Waugh, and Beyer (2004) identified four core ways that GSAs support LGBT students. The first way was that GSAs provided counseling and support for dealing with gender identity issues. Secondly, they provided a safe space for students to congregate and openly discuss their issues. The third and fourth ways that GSAs supported transgender students is that they were the primary vehicles on campus for raising awareness, providing education, and increasing visibility of LGBT issues and making schools safer for LGBT students.

Support groups are also a way school counselors can support transgender students. While a support group specific to transgender identity development would be applicable, transgender students are at a higher risk for issues such as suicide, low self-worth, anxiety, depression, self-harming behavior, and family and friend rejection (Maki Wasell, 2016). School counselors should assess the socio-emotional needs of the transgender students on campus and be willing to coordinate appropriate groups and services on campus.

School counselors are the greatest resource on campus to intervene for individual transgender students. In addition to offering brief counseling, school counselors can provide off-campus resources for transgender students. Gonzalez and McNulty (2010) reported that school counselors should do their research within the community and be able to connect transgender students and their families with online and community resources. These resources should include mental health professionals and doctors that are competent in working with transgender issues. Additionally, school counselors should have a list of referral organizations and support groups specific to transgender youth within the community.

Singh and Burnes (2009) ascertained that not only should school counselors have specific knowledge of resources within their community, but at the high school level they should also have knowledge of state-specific laws concerning parent consent and access to hormones and/or surgeries. It is imperative at this level that school counselors not only have knowledge of resources within the community that offer safe hormone and surgical treatments, but also educate transgender students about the danger of using unregulated hormones found outside of safe and regulated health facilities.

Discussion

It is important that school counselors be prepared to work with transgender students. Kosciw et al. (2016) noted that 63.5% of surveyed LGBT students who reported an incident related to harassment or assault said that school staff responded by either doing nothing or telling the student to ignore it. It is a primary role for school counselors to advocate and intervene for marginalized populations. Despite this, Singh and Shelton (2011) noted that counselors report having insufficient training to work with LGBT issues. Payne and Smith (2011) expressed that no state requires its school counselors and educators be competent in working with LGBT populations. Graybill and Proctor (2016) stated that the majority of educators report feeling uncomfortable or incompetent in helping LGBT youth.

It is imperative that school counseling preparation programs integrate coursework and experience specifically working with transgender individuals. While the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (2015) requires coursework on social and cultural diversity, it does not specify that LGBT issues are discussed nor to what extent they receive attention. Additionally, based on their findings, O'Hara et al. (2013) suggested that current training and practicum are not adequately preparing counselors to work with transgender individuals since there was no significant differences between level of training or completion of a practicum or internship for ratings of competency in working with transgender individuals.

In light of these findings, some researchers have found that when counseling students receive specific training in LGBT issues, their competency increases. Rutter, Estrada, Ferguson, and Diggs (2008) found significant differences between counseling students receiving training related to LGB issues and those who did not on pre- and post-test scores measuring the knowledge and skills concerning sexual orientation. Additionally, Bidell (2014) found that completing a general multicultural counseling course was not a significant predictor on LGB counseling competency, but he did find that taking a course specifically related to LGBT issues had significant effect on LGB counseling competency (Bidell, 2013). Findings such as these further indicate the necessity for school counselors to receive training specifically related to LGBT issues.

In addition to counselor preparation programs not preparing counselors adequately to work with transgender students, literature from school helping professionals only minimally covers LGBT student issues (Graybill & Proctor, 2016). Graybill and Proctor (2016) analyzed content from 2000 to 2014 of eight different journals across the disciplines of school nursing, social work, psychology, and counseling. They found a lack of visibility of LGBT issues in the research. Implications

include the need for school-specific journals across disciplines to give greater attention to transgender student issues.

One additional area that needs attention concerning transgender students is their involvement in sex-segregated activities, such as sports. This is a complex and systemic issue due to sex segregation of athletic governing bodies and needs further attention from parties at all levels of school leadership. While California has instituted an act that allows transgender students to compete in high school athletics, no other state has followed with such an act (Mahoney et al., 2015). School counselors need to continue to advocate for inclusive policies for transgender students at all levels.

Conclusion

The statistics for transgender students in schools indicate a need for change. According to the GLSEN 2015 National School Climate Survey, 43.3% of students feel unsafe because of their gender expression. Additionally, over a third of students surveyed reported avoiding gender-segregated spaces because they felt unsafe. Not only did significant percentages of students report that their school engaged in LGBT-related discriminatory policies (81.6%), but nearly 51% of transgender students reported being prevented from using their preferred name or pronoun (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016).

Education and training are imperative for school counselors and school counselor training programs. Training programs have an ethical responsibility to prepare future school counselors to meet the needs of diverse populations, and to be prepared to enter their field with necessary knowledge and skills to do so in a manner free of personal bias. School counselors' have the ethical obligation to advocate for their students and enforce the rights of all students to be treated with dignity and respect in a safe school environment free from harassment, bullying and abuse (ASCA, 2016). These obligations will continue to unfold as the law catches up with societal demands. Self-awareness, knowledge and utilizing best practices are key ways to support transgender students in schools.

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Appendix: Glossary of Terms

Participants at the Texas School Counseling Association Conference were provided with a list of terms and definitions. Below are some of the terms from Lamba Legal's (2008) publication, *Bending the Mold: An Action Kit for Transgender Youth*, in addition to a few added by the authors.

agender: not identifying with any gender or the feeling of having no gender.

ally: a heterosexual person who supports equal civil rights, gender equality, LGBT social movements, and challenges homophobia and transphobia.

androgynous: having the characteristics or nature of both maleness and femaleness; neither specifically feminine nor masculine.

biological sex, sex: a term used historically and within the medical field to refer to the chromosomal, hormonal, and anatomical characteristics that are used to classify an individual as female or male.

cisgender: refers to people whose gender identity is the same as their assigned or presumed sex at birth.

crossdresser: a person who, on occasion, wears clothing associated with another sex, but who does not necessarily desire to change his or her sex. Many crossdressers identify as heterosexual but can have any sexual orientation.

drag king / drag queen: a performer who wears the clothing associated with another sex, often involving the presentation of exaggerated, stereotypical gender characteristics. The performance of gender by drag queens (males in drag) or drag kings (females in drag) may be art, entertainment, and/or parody.

FTM (female to male), transgender man: terms used to identify a person who was assigned the female sex at birth but who identifies as male.

gender: a set of social, psychological, and emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual as feminine, masculine, androgynous, or other.

gender binary: the concept that everyone must be one of two genders**:** man or woman.

gender dysphoria: an intense, persistent discomfort resulting from the awareness that the sex assigned at birth and the resulting gender role expectations are inappropriate. Some consider gender dysphoria to be a symptom of gender identity disorder, a health condition recognized by the American Psychiatric Association. Many transgender people do not experience gender dysphoria.

gender expression: The outward manifestation of internal gender identity, through clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms, and other characteristics.

gender fluid: Conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender expression, with interests and behaviors that may even change from day to day. A person may feel they are more female on some days and more male on others, or possibly feel that neither term describes them accurately.

gender identity: the inner sense of being a man, a woman, both, or neither. Gender identity usually aligns with a person's sex but sometimes does not.

genderqueer: a term used by some people who may or may not identify as transgender, but who identify their gender as somewhere on the continuum beyond the binary male/female gender system.

gender-nonconforming: behaving in a way that does not match social stereotypes about female or male gender, usually through dress or physical appearance.

gender role: the social expectation of how an individual should act, think, and feel, based upon the sex assigned at birth.

gender transition: the social, psychological and/or medical process of transitioning from one gender to another. Gender transition is an individualized process and does not involve the same steps for everyone. After gender transition, some people identify simply as men or women.

hormone therapy: administration of hormones and hormonal agents to develop characteristics of a different gender or to block the development of unwanted gender characteristics. Hormone therapy is part of many people's gender transitions and is safest when prescribed and monitored by a health care professional.

intersex: a health condition, often present at birth, involving anatomy or physiology that differs from societal expectations of male and female. Intersex conditions can affect the genitals, the chromosomes, and/or other body structures. People with intersex conditions should not be assumed to be transgender.

LBTQIAA: L – Lesbian, G – Gay, B – Bisexual, T – Transgender, Q – Queer/Questioning, I – Intersex, A – Asexual, A – Ally

MTF (male to female), transgender woman: terms used to identify a person who was assigned the male sex at birth but who identifies as female.

oppression: the acts and effects of domination of certain groups in society over others, caused by the combination of prejudice and power. Systems of oppression include racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia.

post-op, pre-op, non-op: terms used to identify a transgender person's surgical status. Use of these terms is often considered insulting and offensive. Surgical status is almost never relevant information for anyone except a transgender person's medical providers.

privilege: social and institutional advantages that dominant groups receive and others do not. Privilege is often invisible to those who have it.

sex reassignment surgery (SRS): any one of a variety of surgeries involved in the process of transition from one gender to another. Many transgender people will not undergo SRS for health or financial reasons, or because it is not medically necessary for them.

sexism: a system of institutionalized practices and individual actions that benefits men over women.

transgender or trans: an umbrella term used to describe those who challenge social gender norms, including genderqueer people, gender-nonconforming people, transsexuals, crossdressers, and so on. People must self-identify as transgender in order for the term to be appropriately used to describe them.

transphobia: the irrational fear of those who challenge gender stereotypes, often expressed as discrimination, harassment, and violence.

transsexual: a person who experiences intense, persistent, long-term discomfort with their body and self-image due to the awareness that their assigned sex is inappropriate. Transsexuals may take steps to change their body, gender role, and gender expression to align them with their gender identity.