A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO RECEIVING SUPPORT FROM THE HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR OR SOCIAL WORKER FROM THOSE WHO QUESTIONED OR IDENTIFIED AS GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, OR TRANSGENDER

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Master of Social Work in the

Graduate School of the Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the role of the high school counselor or social worker supporting adolescents who questioned their sexual identity or identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. There was no statement of hypotheses for this research. The researcher intended to let themes emerge from the data. Ten participants 18 – 21, who attended The Ohio State University, were interviewed about their experiences with the high school counselor or social worker. These participants attended high schools in Texas, California, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio in rural, suburban, and urban settings. The interview process was conducted on the campus of The Ohio State University. Interviews were approximately sixty minutes in length. A grounded theory analysis was conducted on the data collected from the interviews. It was found that homophobic and heterosexist attitudes, prevailing in the schools, hindered receiving support from the counselor or social worker. The emerging discoveries from this analysis revealed that on a micro intervention level, participants wanted their counselors to be non-judgmental with attention to confidentiality, which were strategies not often emphasized by researchers. Because of the fear of identity exposure discussed in this study, another discovery emerged as to the importance placed on counselors and social workers using tools such as GLBT stickers and posters to signify that they were approachable about gay.
lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues. Again, this was a recommendation not often mentioned in the literature. On a macro level, the research analysis revealed that the prevailing homophobic and heterosexist attitudes were found at all levels of the school system including administrators, teachers and even counselors and social workers, these participants wanted to see more diversity initiatives that included GLBT issues. This was another area not often mentioned in the literature.

Another discovery was that, of the ten participants, only one had a social worker available at their school. The majority of participants only had access to a guidance counselor. While the American School Counseling Association emphasizes the importance of developmental issues, including building adolescent social competency, the research indicated that questioning or self-identified GLBT adolescents are having their developmental issues ignored in the schools. Social workers who are educated in valuing diversity for all individuals, and educated to collaborate from a systems perspective could be viable advocates for inclusion of these youths to assist normal development; including social competency.

Another discovery was that as an alternative way of coping with the lack of direct peer support, these adolescents are turning to the Internet for peer-to-peer support with other questioning and self-identified GLBT adolescents. This support resource was found to be a way of coping with the isolation caused by heterosexist attitudes found in peer groups throughout the school. These participants are one of the first groups of students to have grown up with Internet access; therefore, this discovery has not been found in the literature. There needs to be more research to understand the outcomes from using this new source of peer-to-peer support on building social competency.
Overall, the extensive analysis of the literature, compared with the findings from this research, can be a valuable guide to educate school counselors and social workers who are preparing these adolescents for adult life.
Dedicated to all gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender adolescents who need support and guidance in order to become healthy, happy, and successful adults
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

A review of the literature found many recommendations for the counselor or social worker to incorporate into practice when providing support services for those adolescents questioning or identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT). In addition, there is research exposing the barriers that hinder support for this population. A few research studies have been conducted directly with social workers, guidance counselors, and psychologists who practice in the school environment. However, there has been a minimal amount of research, related to counselor or social worker support, from those questioning or identifying as GLBT. This research is focused on their perspective.

One study, conducted by Munoz-Plaza et al. (2002), interviewed twelve 18 – 21 year old GLBT young adults. This study centered on a retrospective look at the general emotional, appraisal, instrumental, and informational support these adolescents found during high school. The researchers found that participants did not disclose their sexual identity to teachers out of fear of rejection, and information on the role of the counselor or social worker was missing from their study.

This grounded theory research intends to use the basic approach of the above study with the intent to investigate the experiences of young adults about the support role
of the high school counselor or social worker. It is with a grounded theory approach, directed at the phenomena surrounding support service provided by the counselor or social worker, from which this researcher will strive to discover emerging theories relevant to the existing research. The results of this study will provide further knowledge to support effective techniques and strategies counselors and social workers will be able to incorporate into their current practice.

The following are the research questions designed to generate theory and further understanding surrounding school counselor and social worker support for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender adolescents. The knowledge and understanding that surround these questions are found to be missing from the literature. (1) What do participants perceive as having hindered or helped them in receiving what was needed from the high school counselor or social worker? (2) What was the perceived helpfulness of the high school counselor or social worker related to GLBT issues? (3) How important was it for the participant to be able to approach their counselor or social worker about GLBT related issues? (4) If there was contact with the counselor or social worker specifically about GLBT issues, what was that experience like? (5) What kind of support activities did participants understand could have further helped them with the issues specifically related to their personal struggles with sexual identity?
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

While the counselor or social worker has a unique opportunity as well as a professional duty to facilitate a safe and supportive learning environment for all students, several scholars have substantiated the support barriers for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) adolescents. What has not been fully explored in the literature is the experience of GLBT adolescents, and their constructed knowledge about the role of the counselor or social work within their overall support network. A review of the literature was completed covering school counselor and social worker support for questioning and self-identified GLBT adolescents. This review included the history and professional standards of the counselor and social worker, homosexual identity development, what is known about the support role of the counselor or social worker working with questioning or GLBT self-identified adolescents, and the known barriers and facilitators that affect support.
2.1 History and Professional Standards of the Counselor and Social Worker

The school social worker, school psychologist, and guidance counselor are three professions, found within the school system, which work to protect and maximize a student’s overall academic achievement and social competence. This is achieved using individual and group counseling, working with families, and educators. The practice of school social work started back in the early 20th century as “visiting teachers” to help facilitate school attendance for the children of immigrant parents. It was much later, during the 1940’s and 1950’s, that their title switched to school social worker with an emphasis more on the mental health aspects of the student. Again, in 1975, with the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, the role responsibilities of the school social worker increased with identifying and using available community resources, counseling students and families using both group and individual counseling, and completing social histories (Agresta, 2004).

School psychology was designated a profession in 1949. As a profession, working with students, the emphasis has been on the assessment of the intellectual, social, and emotional development. While the duties have not changed over the years, there is now more of an emphasis being placed on the task of conducting psychometric testing. As with school social workers, these school psychologists also spend a considerable amount of time in individual and group counseling, consultation and in-service education (Agresta, 2004).

Guidance counseling gained recognition around the beginning of the 20th century. The primary emphasis started with vocational guidance. The direction of this profession
took a turn between 1925 and 1930, centering more on the psychological adjustment and personal problems of students. Then, again in the 1980’s, the emphasis turned to focusing on problems associated with drugs and alcohol, suicide, homelessness, and teen pregnancy (Agresta, 2004).

All three professions have similar roles found within the school, and their professional associations, have similar position statements concerning their role and mission as a profession supporting adolescent development and academic success. Therefore, some discussion has been noted of where roles overlap. Agresta (2004) sampled 183 school social workers, 137 school psychologist, and 166 school counselors about 21 role responsibilities. What she found was that social workers spend the greatest concentration of time on individual counseling, 17.4 percent, followed by administrator and teacher consultation, 11.3 percent, and then group counseling, 10.3 percent.

Similarly, guidance counselors stated that they spent 20 percent of their professional time in individual counseling, only 10 percent of their time in academic advisement, academic scheduling, and college advisement, and 8 percent on administrator and teacher consultation. Alternatively, school psychologist reported that they spent one-fourth of their professional time conducting psychometric testing along with 16 percent of their time on report writing, 11 percent on administrator and teacher consultation, 7 percent on individual counseling, and 3 percent with group counseling. If the results of this study hold true, it would seem that the high school guidance counselor and school social worker, with their professional roles, are in a better position to instill positive student development in both academic processes and social competence.

The American School Counselor Association website states:
“High school is the final transition into adulthood and the world of work as students begin separating from parents and exploring and defining their independence. Students are deciding who they are, what they do well, and what they will do when they graduate. During these adolescent years, students are evaluating their strengths, skills, and abilities. The biggest influence is their peer group. They are searching for a place to belong and rely on peer acceptance and feedback. They face increased pressures regarding risk behaviors involving sex, alcohol, and drugs while exploring the boundaries of more acceptable behavior and mature, meaningful relationships. They need guidance in making concrete and compounded decisions.”

The American School Counselor Association, through their national model, point out several key goals directly encouraging the inclusion of GLBT students. These include education in understanding self and others, coping strategies, peer relationships and effective social skills, and multicultural/diversity awareness. The professional roles cited in this model include individual and small group counseling; individual, family, and school crisis intervention; peer facilitation; consultation and collaboration; and referrals. The skill sets used by these counselors include professional development; consultation and collaboration; and teaming (American School Counselor Association, 2005).  

Both the American Psychological Association and the National Association of School Psychologists in 1993 passed a joint resolution giving support and guidance to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students. This resolution included the promotion of acceptance and understanding for these students:

“The resolution was based in firm ground of the ethical codes of both organizations (APA, 1992; NASP, 1992) – codes that explicitly call for fair, responsive, and respectful service delivery to all people” (Henning-Stout et al., 2000).

The National Association of Social Workers developed several standards, which directly address the role of the social worker working with questioning or GLBT identifying students. Standard number 14 states that the role of the social worker is to
collaborate, coordinate, and create services, as well as working as a change agent, identifying areas of need. The standard number 9 states that social workers will meet the needs of students and families by collaborating "to mobilize the resources of local education and community agencies" (Schreiner-Brecht, et al., 2003). As further discussed by these scholars,

"school social workers are uniquely positioned within the school community to provide coordination of services to students and their families. They are an integral part of the school team, and understand school, family, and social systems. School social workers focus on both internal and external factors that influence learning. They are skilled in bringing diverse individuals or groups together, fostering an environment that is safe and respectful."

Constable et al. (2002) states that the social work value number 4 emphasizes, "the right of each individual to be different from every other and to be accorded respect for those differences (p. 10)." In conjunction with this value, these scholars go on to state that "the philosophies of inclusion and respect for individual differences continue to shape profoundly the practice of education and provide the basis for the role of the school social worker (p. 9).” Cited by these scholars was Constin (1973) who developed the school community pupil relations model. She based this model on two key observations. The deficiencies in the school and community systems and its specific characteristics when interacting with student characteristics at different life cycle stress points. She then gave seven functions of the school social worker that facilitate students based on these observations. These are

"(1) Direct counseling with individuals, groups, and families, (2) advocacy, (3) consultation, (4) community linkage, (5) interdisciplinary team coordination, (6) needs assessment, and (7) program and policy development (pp. 16-17)."
Scholars discuss the importance of the school social worker’s understanding of the importance of building social competence in all adolescents found within the school system. When discussing social competence, Constable et al. (2002) states that

“School social workers stand at the interface not only of child and school, but of family and school, and community and school. Thus, they are in a position to help child, parents, and community develop social competence and, at the same time, to help increase the school’s responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of children, parents, and community. Social competence as a human attribute or achievement is tied to ideas of self-esteem and identity. It includes effectiveness with respect to knowing and deciding when to take action in the environment, as opposed to a passive orientation to life and its events and processes. It is tied also to relative autonomy from internal pressures and external demands, while maintaining relatedness to other human beings, to the world of nature, and to one’s own internal needs (Germain, 1978). This appears to be a nonnormative set of ideas fitting any cultural context in any historical era, for it is the culture and the times that define the actual substance of such competence.”

What is important to note is that all adolescents, in order to gain a sense of social competence, must feel comfortable when interacting with their environment. As discussed by this scholar, the surrounding culture and historical era play a part in establishing the boundaries affecting self-esteem and identity development. Since school social workers are at the forefront, interacting with all parts of the systemic entities, it is important to understand those aspects that hinder adolescent development found within these interacting systems. It is vital that attention be brought to the importance of social competence when working with questioning and GLBT identifying students. As further discussed by Constable et al. (2002), the work of several notable theorist helps to further understand the importance of social competence and it’s relevance to questioning and GLBT identifying adolescents.

“Piaget referred to competence when he described how children’s intellect develop through opportunities to take action on the environment, assimilating and accommodating the external into internal cognitive structures (as cited in Evans,
1973). This is the value of Erikson’s formulation for social work, their ability to achieve competence will also depend on the qualities of the impinging social and physical environments, particularly the family, the school, and the community. These environments must provide the growth-inducing conditions and the right stimuli at the right time and in the right amount if children are to achieve the tasks involved in establishing identity and competence. Otherwise, they may be left with residues of inferiority – social, intellectual, physical, or emotional – that may affect their ability to handle later tasks (p. 28).”

2.2 Identity Development of GLBT Adolescents

The American Psychiatric Association in 1973 removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, and the World Health Organization in 1992 removed it from the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, Rivers and Carragher (2003). Homosexuality no longer has the classification as a mental disorder. The exact reasons for sexual identity development towards a certain sexual orientation remain unknown, but there are many scholars found in the current literature who believe that a person’s sexual orientation is not a choice; individuals do not choose to be homosexual or heterosexual Frankowski (2004). Additionally, as cited by Uribe (1994),

“Eichberg (1990) notes that the term sexual orientation rather than sexual preference is the best choice when referring to homosexuality. As a sexual orientation, homosexuality is just the way it is – it is not a choice. Most lesbians and gay men experience little or no choice about their sexual orientation; rather, it is generally present throughout their life and is neither more nor less conscious a choice than being a heterosexual.”

In the high school setting, McFarland (2001) believes, based on the estimated percentages of the U. S. population who are homosexual, that one in twenty of all
adolescents who attend public school are either gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. He goes on to state that when a teacher instructs a class at least one of his or her students would therefore be a GLBT student.

Pope (1995) strongly believes that the “developmental task of discovery and acceptance of who we are and how we function sexually plays an important role, especially in adolescence.” This scholar goes on to say that it is during this time that many gay and lesbian adolescents experience the most “denial of their differences” by their peers and others within their environment. Cooley (1998), states, “according to Erikson (1963), identity formation is the most important developmental task of adolescence.” Pope cites his work with Jelly, believing that there are separate and specific developmental stages of self-identity formation faced by GLBT adolescents, which can be comparable “to those described by the major developmental theorists, including Freud, Erickson, Piaget, Kohlberg, and Super.” One of the major developmental differences, discussed by scholars, is that the family would need to “discover” that the adolescent self-identifies as GLBT; it is unlike being born into a visible minority status. Upon identity disclosure, many parents are then not in a position to guide the adolescent because they do not identify in the same way, and therefore many will disown or separate themselves from their child causing further developmental issues. Morrow (1993) states that

“In various socially oppressed ethnic and cultural groups, the family typically serves as a focus of validation and teaching about what it is like to be a member of an oppressed population. For example, the parents of an African American or Jewish child teach their child what it is like to be African American or Jewish in our culture. Such is not the case for gay and lesbian adolescents. Because most parents are heterosexual, they cannot teach their lesbian or gay adolescent what it
is like to be a member of the gay or lesbian culture; they are unable to be role
models of a positive gay or lesbian identity for their child.”

As Pope (1995) states, with regards to the critical importance of positive guidance during
the stages of adolescent identity development,

“Unfortunately, if the developmental tasks of sexual orientation identification are
not accomplished during this critical time and are denied and delayed, then other
tasks are also delayed, causing an identification chain reaction and delaying other
tasks such as relationship formation. It is very common to hear gay men who
came out when they were substantially past adolescence and have all the problems
associated with those of teenagers who have just begun dating. It is important to
note that, once the critical period has passed in the developmental task, it may be
very difficult or impossible to correct the psychological difficulties that have
occurred as a result of this.”

Several scholars (Fontaine and Hammond, 1996; Hollander, 2000; Marszalek and
Cashwell, 1999; Pearson, 2003; Pope, 1995; Zera 1992) cite the homosexual identity
formation model, consisting of six stages developed by Cass (1979). Many scholars
believe that these stages are the framework for the coming out process. The first stage is
identity confusion where the adolescent realizes that he or she is different from peers. In
the second stage, identity comparison, the adolescent will act heterosexual because of the
fear of looking different. The third stage, identity tolerance, finds the adolescent
realizing he or she is homosexual, but the adolescent has negative feelings about this
identity. In the fourth stage, identity acceptance, assimilation into the gay community
begins with the individual taking steps to reach out to the community. The fifth stage is
identity pride where the individual is more involved in the gay community and personally
more accepting of his or her identity. The sixth and last stage is synthesis; where the
individual is able to disseminate from others and becomes more tolerant and accepting of
those differences without causing internal conflict.
Alternatively, several scholars, (Cooley, 1998; Hollander, 2000; Zera, 1992) discuss Troiden’s homosexual identity development model. The first stage is sensitization where a child realizes, before puberty, that he or she is different from same-sex peers. The second stage is identity confusion happening in the adolescent where he or she has internal conflict with possibly being gay or lesbian. The third stage is identity assumption where the acceptance of the sexual orientation is realized. The person in this stage will reach out to the gay community and explore more of his or her sexual identity. This stage happens usually in later adolescence and early adulthood. The last stage, commitment, is where the individual realizes the necessity in committing to their identity to further develop and accomplish having a successful adult life. Anderson (1987) believes that with the adolescent who questions his or her sexuality identity, the awareness begins around the ages of 12 to 14. Fontaine and Hammond (1996) believe that it is the first two stages of Cass’s model where development takes place during the high school period. Other scholars are finding that the age of identifying as gay or lesbian is happening at an earlier age. Saltzburg (2004) states, “An increasing number of adolescents are claiming their gay and lesbian identities at an earlier age in conjunction with increased gay and lesbian activism.”

Cass’s model, and to some extent Troiden’s developmental model, describe a linear progression through the developmental stages. However, as noted by Hollander (2000), what is important to note is that Troiden believes the stages are not completely linear for a very important reason, external causality.

“Although the model is linear and stage-dependent, movement through the stages can be affected by relative youth, gender atypicality, high school homosexual experience, and a supportive environment (all of which are said to facilitate
development), high school heterosexual experience and non-accepting family or friends might slow development.”

Other developmental models contend that gay and lesbian sexual identity development is more of a spiral progression through the sexual identity stages, Pearson (2003). In their article, Carroll and Gilroy (2001) discuss two such theoretical models surrounding development. These are constructivist and queer theories. Constructivists believe that knowledge is “invented” and “reality is constructed rather than objective.” “The goal of queer theory is not just to deconstruct the binary oppositions that govern identity formation but also to expose the power imbalances underlying them” (Carlson, 1998). These scholars believe that queer theory, while similar to constructivism, still differs.

“Queer theory (a variation of poststructural theory) regards identity categories and labels like ‘heterosexual,’ ‘homosexual,’ and ‘bisexual,’ with suspicion, viewing these as regulatory mechanisms of the dominant culture.”

The overall importance of these two developmental perspectives, as it relates to sexual identity development, is that there is the possibility for a more fluid progression, as evidenced by the constructivist view, and that queer theory highlights this understanding; labeling sexual identity “as a way of limiting the possibilities of the self.” Furthermore, Palma & Stanley (2002) talk about social constructionism.

“Social constructionism argues that the labels ascribed to sexual minorities have differed over time and among diverse peoples (Kitzinger, 1995). By asserting that sociocultural factors inform one’s self-identification, constructionists account for marked differences in experience, behavior, and personal characteristics within and between sexual identity categories. This perspective can also explain individual fluidity (changes) in sexual identity over time.”

They go on to state that
“to embrace social constructionism potentially reinforces the rationale of individuals advocating a pathological view of an LGB identity. If environment solely influences the formation of an LGB identity, it is subsequently reasonable to assume that an individual can be socially reoriented to a heterosexual identity.”

While there is no concrete basis for the belief that the individual’s environment solely influences sexual identity development, or that an individual can be socially reoriented to a heterosexual identity, the above theoretical developmental perspectives do have important value for further understanding about homosexual identity development. First, when societal constraints are put onto a person it has an influence on sexual identity development, as an example, the presence of homophobia within the environment. Secondly, these development perspectives have particular importance for understanding the identity development differences that several scholars believe exist between lesbian and gay men. There is a belief that instinctual differences exists between male and females. Several believe that Cass’s linear development model is more aligned with male homosexual identity development, and the constructivist view of development relates more to lesbian identity development. Marszalek and Cashwell (1999) further clarify this

“Cass (1990) recognized that identity development can vary based on gender and listed several differences between the identity development of gay men and lesbians. First, men are more likely to have a sexually stimulating experience trigger the identity development process, whereas women are more likely to have an emotional experience trigger the process. Second, women are more likely to reject female gender roles, and men are more likely to modify male gender roles. Cass (1990) hypothesized that society views the male gender role as including power, knowledge, and independence, but society views the female gender role as passive and consisting of caring for others. Consequently, there may be less incentive for men to reject their male gender role. Finally, Cass believed that compared with gay men, lesbians often develop a lesbian identity later in life.”

Looking further at homosexual identity development, many researchers agree that the prevalence of societal homophobia is by far the most damaging influence on GLBT
adolescent sexual identity development. Vare and Norton (1998) state that homophobia stops the flow of needed information during identity formation and creates isolation. The result is higher rates of suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder, and problems with alcohol and substance abuse; a result of internalized homophobia produced by being a sexual minority in a heterosexist society. These scholars discuss the adolescent’s reaction to this isolation; what they call “social stigma.” Gay and lesbian youth are then dealing with these internal emotions and feelings related to their identity development without the help of those professionals in the school that they need the most. The social stigma causes the questioning or identifying adolescent to use coping skills to adopt a more heterosexual identity that counters their true developing identity. As noted in their article

“The resulting isolation can hamper gay and lesbian youth in the accomplishment of certain developmental tasks – attaining a sense of identity, the capacity for intimacy, and a sense of self that contributes to psychological and physical independence (Cook and Pawlowski 1991)”.

Martin & Hetrick (1988) believe that isolation affects three main areas of development for the GLBT questioning youth. Those are cognitive, social, and emotional development. The cognitive component consist of the lack of visible role models and information available about gays and lesbians coupled with overwhelming negative misconceptions that are associated with prejudice about gays and lesbians. Secondly, there is the social isolation that comes from being at risk in their families, and in the institutions, they depend on for socialization, as they are questioning their sexual identity. The last component for developmental concern is the emotional isolation compounded by the adolescent knowing he or she is different without the needed support. The research has shown there is the greater possibility of suicide by these adolescents
when these areas of development continue to be impacted in a negative manner. Riddle (1996) states that

“The suicide statistics alone are frightening, and an often-cited study by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services referenced by Gibson (1989) found that: (1) Gay teens may be two to three times more likely to attempt suicide, (2) Gay youth comprise as much as thirty percent of the actual number of suicides, and (3) Suicide is the leading cause of death of young gay males and lesbians.”

This scholar goes on to point out how this referenced study found two main reasons for such high rates of suicide among this population. The first is that schools are not protecting these adolescents from verbal and physical abuse, and second there is the lack of programs available to educate school environments on homosexuality.

When faced with so many obstacles during their adolescent development, many GLBT adolescents decide to keep their sexual orientation and sexual identity formation struggles concealed, which furthers the level of isolation. Rivers and Carragher (2003) cite Radkowsky and Seigel, (1997) who suggested that out of fear, lesbian and gay youth use various strategies to conceal their identities. Therefore, they are cognitively aware of their choices of clothing, speech, postures, interests, friends, and demeanor.

“At a time when other adolescents are discovering how to express themselves socially, those youth who identify as lesbian or gay but wish to remain hidden are learning to conceal large parts of themselves from their family and friends.”

Uribe and Harbeck (1992) have discussed how emotionally and socially crippling these concealment strategies are to those GLBT adolescents who are forming their identities. Martin and Hetrick, (1988) believe that the major obstacle for GLBT adolescent development is to resolve the social stigmatization resulting from society.
2.3 Support Role of the High School Counselor and Social Worker

Paisley and Hayes (2003) believe that school counselors are in the right position to be the advocates for all students tearing down the walls that interfere with success in the schools. When discussing the issue of educating school counselors, House and Hayes (2002) state that

“accountability for student achievement has traditionally been seen as the responsibility of teachers, administrators, and central office personnel who are in charge of curriculum and instructional programs. In reality, accountability for school success is everyone's responsibility and also includes school counselors, psychologists, social workers, staff, students, parents, business people, and the community.”

One suggestion offered by Tasker & McCann (1999), is for school personnel to use “Professional practices.” For instance, they believe that the school psychologists should work to communicate the importance of the rights and welfare needs of sexual minority students, and the need to work with other related disciplines to come up with ways of support that maintain dignity and respect for individual values related to sexual orientation. These scholars emphasize the importance for the counselor to be open and to project a setting that is comfortable in order to work with the young person struggling with his or her sexual identity issues. If the counselor does not project an openness and willingness to work with issues of sexual identity, the young person is subjecting him or herself to further denial and prejudice. Therefore, at the on-set, the adolescent will probably monitor counselor response looking for acceptance and not judgment.

Callahan (2000) believes it is important to realize that these adolescents may not come right out and present their issues as being related to their sexual identity. She goes on to give several key strategies for counselors working with sexual minority adolescents.
First, it is important for the counselor to understand the developmental stages specific to these adolescent youths who are questioning or self-identifying as GLBT. Additionally, it is important for the counselor to exhibit a value of intolerance for those who do not value diversity. The purpose of these kinds of actions, on the part of the counselor, is to create a safe place where questioning and self-identified GLBT adolescents will feel comfortable to approach and discuss the issues. In a separate article by Callahan (2001), she again stressed the importance of several strategies that counselors must use in order to work effectively with gay and lesbian adolescents who are struggling with their sexual orientation. The first strategy is to be educated on the issue of homosexuality, and work through any issues related to their own prejudice, ignorance, and fear. These issues can interfere with supporting gay, lesbian, and bisexual students.

Tasker and McCann (1999) go on to discuss affirming the adolescent’s sexual identity. It is critical for counselors to be aware of the importance of what they call a dual task of being open to understanding identity formation and “the fluidity of adolescent sexuality, and yet be ready to affirm a lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual identity decision by the young person” (Tasker & McCann, 1999). These scholars stress the importance of having the ability to be flexible and open to the discussion of sexual identity with the adolescent, and if needed to refer the adolescent to those who are specialized in GLBT issues. It is during the counseling process that the therapist can either affirm or deny the struggles of these GLBT adolescents. The prejudice and intolerance of the therapist can interfere with the counseling process, and it can be especially detrimental if the counselor has not received the appropriate and specific training on the issues related to GLBT adolescent development. In their article, Uribe
and Harbeck (1992) concluded that adults could aid gay and lesbian adolescent
development by providing them “adequate, honest information about themselves or
others who are like them.” Additionally, Callahan (2001) cited Flax (1990) who
emphasized the resolution passed by The National Education Association to have school
counselors in every district on-site and trained to work with students who are questioning
their sexual orientation.

One of the critical understandings for social workers and counselors who work
with GLBT adolescents is with their self-awareness. Many of these adolescents are
struggling with their sexual identity, and they more often than not are internalizing the
homophobic attitudes that surround them. This causes problems with normal
development and the ability to be resilient. Therefore, counselors, again, need to be
educated and equipped with the knowledge of sexual identity development and
adjustments for gay and lesbian youth in counseling. Additionally, as noted previously,
counselors should look at their own heterosexist attitudes and search for areas of
internalized homophobic biases (Lipkin, 1999). Uribe and Harbeck (1992) presented an
article that discusses the success of PROJECT 10, which was developed in the late
eighties by Virginia Uribe. It was a project set up as an in-school counseling program in
West Hollywood, California at the Fairfax High School. The program addressed the
needs for resources, education, information, and referrals for those adolescents that were
gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The secondary goal of the project was to bring awareness and
acceptance, to the greater school community, of the issues surrounding this population.
This project turned out to be a model for other programs nationwide. Between 1984 and
1987 an interview sample of 50 adolescent respondents, who identified as gay, lesbian, or
bisexual, were asked about their problems, attitudes and experiences within this program. A second sample of 342 randomly selected students from the Fairfax High School was gathered to identify the positive and negative attitudes about the program throughout the school population. What was discovered is that the tendency for self-destructive behavior was correlated to the lack of self-esteem from exposure to school-based homophobia, but these destructive behaviors can be changed when there is “educational intervention” to help eliminate negative attitudes and stereotypes of homosexuality. The study concluded that the counseling needs for GLBT adolescents are “inadequately attended.”

Callahan (2000) discusses the importance of the school social worker or counselor to follow the counseling code of ethics, which “respect all people regardless of race, sex, and sexual orientation.” She goes on to say that

“Counselors and school personnel who are afraid to address issues with gay and lesbian students are psychologically narrowing down their worlds and are ethically and legally shirking their responsibilities to students.”

As she noted in her article, the American School counselor Association in 1995 issued a position statement concerning sexual minority youth. This statement called for supporting and eliminating discrimination against these adolescents.

Several scholars address the importance of creating a multicultural competent school environment, which includes recognition of those students who are questioning or self-identifying as GLBT. Discussing the role school counselors’ play in the development of their students, Paisley and McMahon (2001) stressed the importance of possessing multicultural skills to build competency. They state that
“Nowhere is this truer than in schools, where school counselors must promote the development of all students and enhance the school climate to make the school a place where all children can and want to learn.”

Lee (2001) gave us a description in his work describing a “culturally responsive school.” This scholar communicated the following five functions for culturally responsive schools for all students. (1) Promoting the development of positive self-identification (2) Facilitating the development of positive interpersonal relationships among students from diverse backgrounds (3) Promoting academic achievement (4) Promoting attitudes and skills necessary for school success, and (5) Facilitating career exploration and choice process among young people. Another scholar addressed this need for cultural competence in the school environment, and he specifically addressed GLBT students. Freeman (1998) stated

“In schools, the increasing cultural diversity among students and families, issues of gender differences and sexual harassment, and the handling of intolerance and violence toward gay and lesbian students represent opportunities for helping students and school staff to learn to live successfully in a multicultural world. Students are most open at younger ages to learning about tolerance and social justice and about the importance of culture to all students.”

Pope (1995) believes it is very important for the counselor to understand and be familiar with the history and obstacles faced by what he calls a “cultural minority.” He believes that “special needs” surface for gay and lesbian’s because of this status as a “cultural minority” because of the “historic discrimination that has helped define the gay and lesbian community.”

“These include a lack of civil rights, secret, or semi-secret lives, oppression, rejection or ostracism by their family of origin, societal censure, lowered self-esteem due to internalized homophobia, fear of physical violence, and status as the object of campaigns of hatred and vilification by right-wing political groups and fundamentalist religious groups (Cooper, 1989)”.

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In an excerpt produced by Independent School, Roffman (2001) noted that because of the visibility of gay and lesbian issues in our society, it is important to teach our youth about these issues to dismantle myths, misconceptions, and misunderstandings about gay and lesbian issues. This author states the importance of breaking the “silence, confusion, and conflict, and inaction” from adults who ignore these issues. Her belief is that by ignoring issues it leads to further destructive behavior such as homophobia, which is prevalent and witnessed by these students everyday. She goes on to state that

“Lessons in school about homosexuality are not intended to promote anything but education, understanding, and safer school environments. They do not advocate that people become gay, only acknowledge that some people are gay......Almost always, the most important topics that arise in such conversations are not about sex, or even sexual orientation, but about issues of bias and discrimination, respect and tolerance. The learning typically goes way beyond ‘gay sex’ or even the ‘gay issue’ to discussions of ethical and kind treatment of others. In addition, because children of all ages understand name-calling and mistreatment – and how very much they can hurt – the topic can be handled in an age-appropriate fashion at almost any age. It is never too early for children to talk about respect and to learn about differences among people.”

One scholar sums up the counselor’s role in providing counseling treatment and intervention for all of these areas. Her belief is that counselors must be unbiased, educated, understanding of the position these adolescents are in, advocate for their inclusion, and provide familial support, resources, and information which are relevant to the issues that affect this population. This scholar goes on to point out many of the critical problems found throughout the literature which are detrimental to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender adolescent today. The first is development of social identity, the second is isolation, the third is educational issues, the fourth is family issues, and the fifth is health risks (Cooley, 1998).
2.4 Barriers and Facilitators Affecting Support

Robinson (1994) believes that school counselors ignore any mention of the issues related to GLBT adolescents because of both internal and external factors. She broke these factors down as stemming from two specific areas, homophobia, and institutional discrimination. Dulaney and Kelly (1982) cited a study by De Crescenzo and McGill where eight different agency groups in the Los Angeles area were sampled for homophobic attitudes. The design of the study was to uncover homophobic attitudes held by practitioners, and the analysis was based on 140 returned questionnaires. What was found is that scores for “homophobic elements” were highest for social workers, followed by psychiatrists and then psychologists. It was believed that the results should have been more skewed toward non-homophobic attitudes because of the location, which is assumed more tolerant of different sexual orientations. This scholar goes on to state

“A counselor’s homophobia may seriously cloud his or her clinical assessment and interventions. Research suggests that counselors tend to view sexual orientation as the cause of problems in homosexuals, rather than viewing some more typical explanation as causative (Davidson & Friedman, 1981).”

In a more recent study conducted by Berkman and Zinberg (1997) it was found that out of 187 social workers only 10% were found to be homophobic. These participants were given the Index of Attitudes toward Homosexuality, the Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scales, and a newly created scale to measure heterosexist bias. These researchers found that the majority of the participants held heterosexist attitudes. If there were no heterosexist attitudes, that score was found to be 13. This study revealed that the mean score for heterosexist attitudes of the respondents was 15
points higher than 13. As was discussed by these scholars, having a heterosexist attitude implies a belief that heterosexuality is “superior to and/or more ‘natural’ than homosexuality.” These scholars go on to state that

“Heterosexual bias is a more subtle concept than homophobia and entails the belief that heterosexuality is normative and that nonheterosexuality is deviant and intrinsically less desirable. Heterosexism is often manifested by individuals who would not be considered as being blatantly homophobic or holding negative attitudes. This often subtle heterosexism permeates the culture in which social institutions and social work practice are built.”

The second factor that Robinson cites as affecting counselors from addressing GLBT adolescent youth issues is because of institutional discrimination. She states that

“Questions regarding sexual orientation are not asked, general information about sexual identity is not offered, and referrals for individual therapy or group support are not made. The avoidance of these issues is clearly institutional denial of the existence of gay and lesbian students.”

Riddle (1996) noted that many GLBT adolescent youth do not feel comfortable in many school environments to come out about questioning or self-identifying as gay or lesbian. Therefore, many school personnel believe that their school does not have any GLBT students, when in fact; the real issue is that the hostility and repression felt by these students warrants even more of a reason for gay affirming actions to be taken by school counselors and social workers. As Riddle stated in his article, “What appears to be close to invisibility of gays in some of our schools should not be seen as an excuse to ignore their needs, but rather a sign that we are failing them.” Ryan and Rivers (2003) cite a study conducted by GLSEN, in 1998, which found that of 42 of the largest school districts in the United States, less than half, had polices to protect GLBT students and teachers from discrimination and harassment. Furthermore, these school districts did not support clubs or gay straight alliances that educate on the issues related to homophobia
and harassment, nor did they have available information on gays and lesbians, or offered staff training on the issues that surround GLBT adolescents. Two of the most significant findings were that only 24% of the school districts offered staff training on GLBT issues. Street (1994) and Rivers and Carragher (2003), cite a study by Mercier and Berger (1989) which found that of 46 homosexual adolescents there were only 15% who felt that “they believed school counselors would be ‘helpful’ in working with their homosexuality issues” and “43% stated that they believed counselors would be ‘unhelpful’.” Woodiel et al. (2003) cited another study conducted by Sears (1992) which rank ordered measurements of attitudes about gay and lesbian youth and teachers and found that over two-thirds of the school counselors gave responses that were negative. She goes on to state that it is because of these percentages that school counselors need to look at the issues surrounding gay adolescents. This scholar goes on to discuss the hesitancy by many school counselors in offering counseling services to gay adolescents because of the lack of specific training needed to address the issues for this population. She noted that because of the isolation felt by these gay adolescents, they need reassurance and guidance in accepting themselves and building self-esteem.

Callahan (2001) stated, “Betz (1991) and Graham et al. (1984) indicated that counselors are not trained to work with gay and lesbian clients.” The lack of education causes myths that many social workers and counselors believe to be true. For instance, Vare and Norton (1998) discuss myths, which interfere with counselor perceptions surrounding sexual orientation in adolescents. One myth is that homosexuality is an adult issue therefore many school personnel ignore the needs of the adolescents who are questioning their sexual orientation or identifying as GLBT. The myth is coupled with a
second misconception that during adolescence most will experiment and later will identify as heterosexual. These myths feed a reaction, which ignore the existence of specific needs for those adolescents who are questioning or self-identifying as GLBT, and they only help feed the school climate of homophobia. Tasker and McCann (1999) discuss this belief:

"Holding this view will likely prevent the therapist from accepting the concept of a healthy, well-adjusted, gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity during adolescence that will not be eventually resolved within a heterosexual framework."

In another article by Bahr, et al. (2000) the competence of school personnel to adequately work with GLBT adolescents was discussed. Again, this scholar found the need for continuous education and training in this area, as well as the need for counselors to explore their own feelings and values about sexual orientation and to monitor these personal limitations so as not to interfere with providing quality services to the adolescent youth. These scholars stressed the importance of counselors to know when other professionals and specialist should be brought into the intervention process.

During the literature review, several scholars were found to have given support recommendations for counselors, psychologists, and social workers supporting gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender adolescents. The goal for this researcher was to bring all the recommendations together into one cohesive format for comparison and analysis. The researcher decided to do a critical analysis of this literature to accomplish this goal. The process of this analysis was the following steps. The researcher took all reviewed literature, listed in the reference section, and pulled out all articles that gave recommendations and suggestions. There were thirty scholarly articles giving recommendations. The researcher went through and tabulated how many of the 30
articles gave the same, or similar, recommendations. The researcher then combined categories that were similar making judgments on the meanings based on what was being presented by the authors. This resulted in 91 recommendations with varying numbers of scholars addressing these various recommendations. These identified recommendations were grouped into six categories based on the type of support they referenced. Scholars were assigned a number. If a scholar mentioned a particular recommendation, their number was noted next to the recommendation. The results of this critical analysis gives a clearer picture of what is being recommended as needed for support, and to some extent, it helps to make sense of the research that has been done. The limitations of this analysis were the possibility the researcher might have unknowingly been biased in the interpretation of the existing literature. This is where it was important to look at which data were analyzed. It was decided that the more current literature, as well as articles reviewed for this study, were more relevant for inclusion. The clarity of how support recommendations were presented was forthcoming and therefore not seen as causing a problem with reliability.

This researcher put these 91 recommendations/strategies for school counselors and social workers into 6 categories consisting of Resource Options; Strategies for Working with Teachers, Administrators and Staff; Diversity Initiatives; Micro Level Interventions and Support Strategies; Professional skills of the Counselor and Social Worker; and Macro Level Interventions and Support Strategies. Upon completion of this task, a better consensus emerged of those support recommendations that counselors and social workers can use to guide their role to support GLBT adolescent students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support Recommendations and Strategies</th>
<th>Scholar Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Designate a resource person for the school</td>
<td>12,8,11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters/stickers in office</td>
<td>2,14,8,23,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know resources available in the community and aware of gay-affirmative</td>
<td>11,29,2,19,20,30,10,5,28,15,8,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>therapist, physicians, support groups in community</td>
<td>27,24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources available in open accessible place that do not attract attention</td>
<td>19,24,12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screen resources for safety and appropriateness</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have books available as part of the guidance resources</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer appropriate referrals and If uncomfortable refer students elsewhere</td>
<td>19,24,28,15,12,6,27,11,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for counseling</td>
<td>10,1,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer gay literature/pamphlets</td>
<td>19,28,15,8,21,11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for school libraries to have collection of books on GLBT</td>
<td>11,18,30,8,27,16,26,29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate online discussions and/or question answer sessions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselors be familiar with youth agencies</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit and support community centers for GLBT</td>
<td>4,11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite gay, lesbian, and bisexual panels from nearby college or university</td>
<td>29,11,19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to conduct classroom discussion or speak to student body</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate and initiate Gay/Straight alliances</td>
<td>18,30,22,14,9,7,29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include GLBT resources to social issues and prevention programs at health</td>
<td>3,22,13,29,28,7,14,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fairs offered by school guidance and health offices; expand sex-ed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curriculum to include LGBT issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate teams of the counselor and one or two faculty/community</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>members and one or two GLBT students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate a focus or support group and small group discussions</td>
<td>19,20,30,15,13,26,29,27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer parents to organizations such as PFLAG</td>
<td>12,23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide school-based support for GLBT youth and families and offer parent</td>
<td>29,11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>informational meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support community action to reduce hate crimes and heighten community</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know ministers, priests and rabbis in the community</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement violence prevention activities</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate programs to prevent bullying</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 Resource Options
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for Working with Teachers, Administrators, and Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for inclusion in textbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with teachers for inclusion in lesson plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage teachers to select classroom reading materials that portray gay and lesbian in an accurate and positive light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage in-service day to address both homophobic and needs of GLBT students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train peer educators/counselors for sensitivity to GLBT issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage the use of historical GLBT figures into curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage the use of film and video to positively reflect lives of GLBT people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and staff workshops about homosexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training of effective methods for interrupting homophobic harassment to administrators, teachers and support staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for education for other school personnel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 Strategies for Working with Teachers, Administrators, and Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diversity Initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intolerance for not valuing diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social workers become role models of respect and acceptance of diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate diversity via assemblies, speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human relations sessions for staff and student to include sexual diversity issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage and acquire educational resources promoting acceptance – diversity posters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include diversity awareness and multicultural initiatives info on GLBT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3 Diversity Initiatives

29
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Micro Level Interventions and Support Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoid heterosexual bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use inclusive language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use client language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use neutral language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss GLBT issues in the broader context of relationships of homosexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't plan to change the clients' sexual orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a nonjudgmental therapeutic intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be comfortable discussing issues surrounding sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about issues that affect their lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take responsibility to bring up the topics surrounding GLBT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop strategies to help students ease into discussions of sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not label youth as homosexual/heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept the youth as they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow them to self-disclose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow them to share perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand dissonance part of coming out process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help youth with identity development issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be aware of the issues surrounding these adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include questions about sexuality issues in first interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't assume every problem is about sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not ignore possible impact of sexual orientation on client problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on sexual orientation to the extent that it is the focus for clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen carefully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer confidential, sensitive counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address health concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help adolescent adjust to social stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to involve their parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage exploring coming out to family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help the parents of GLBT adolescents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.4 Micro Level Interventions and Support Strategies
### Professional Skills of the Counselor and Social Worker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be well informed on sexual identity development</td>
<td>10,5,1,26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make sure to be educated and knowledgeable on homosexuality</td>
<td>3,10,5,1,13,6,21,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore personal feelings and attitudes about homosexuality</td>
<td>19,30,5,13,21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of special needs of gay teens</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for this population</td>
<td>15,13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative support</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge anti-gay verbal or written remarks</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively support safe environment</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break down the barriers of homophobia</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for ways to introduce students to positive gay and lesbian role models</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispel negative stereotypes, myths and discrimination</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue more research on GLBT adolescents</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be proactive instead of reactive</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.5 Professional Skills of the Counselor and Social Worker

### Macro Level Interventions and Support Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macro-Level Intervention</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work to decrease heterosexism within the school system</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commit to the idea that the mission of public schools is to serve all children</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote policies that protect students against sexual harassment</td>
<td>14,8,23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate with community for nondiscrimination – policies to protect educational rights of GLBT</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage school officials to allow written community activities for all minority groups including GLBT</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become involved in supportive public and institutional policy decisions</td>
<td>4,16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for sexual orientation non-discrimination policy to retain GLBT teachers</td>
<td>18,14,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for anti-harassment policy that prevents homophobic slurs and violence</td>
<td>18,12,9,26,11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role models encourage hiring and open gay and lesbian counselors, social workers, teachers and administrators</td>
<td>18,28,14,12,13,6,11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate school forms to ensure sensitivity to diverse families</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.6 Macro Level Interventions and Support Strategies
In summary, counselors and social workers, working in the school environment, abide by a code of ethics, which promotes inclusion of all students. These professionals also understand that their goal, for high school students, is to provide support that gives every student the opportunity for academic success, and the opportunity to build social competency for successful transition into adulthood. The literature surrounding this area has revealed the consequences of ignoring the needs of questioning and GLBT self-identified adolescents, for instance higher suicide rates caused by isolation. These scholars have also established the barriers that are found to hinder adequate support to this population from the counselors, social workers, and other administrators. Therefore, as found in the literature, many scholars offer recommendations for intervention strategies and techniques at various levels when working with these adolescents. This study is being conducted to understand the related experiences from those who questioned or self-identified as GLBT while in high school. The goal of this study is to determine those intervention strategies found to be the most important to ensure high school success both academically and socially, which can be incorporated into the role responsibilities of the counselor or social worker. The best research approach to discovery these intervention support strategies would be with a qualitative research study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This is a grounded theory, qualitative study investigating the high school experiences of college students, 18 – 21 years of age, who as adolescents, questioned their sexual identity or identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Therefore, this research aimed to generate a better understanding of the support role of the high school counselor or social worker, from their lived experience; it is a subjective and interpretive perspective, from which to build theory.

3.1 Research Framework

The study of counselor support, through the experiences and perceptions of those who have experienced questioning their sexual identity or identified as GLBT while in high school, lends itself to qualitative research. This study gives the researcher a fresh start to identify further aspects of this phenomenon being studied; where a quantitative study would not necessarily be the best choice of research method to accomplish this task. Therefore, the purpose of this study was not to do hypothesis testing but rather to explore emerging themes related to school counselor and social worker support.
The researcher purposefully used a structured interview with a common interview schedule, which contained specific questions. The researcher went into the interviews asking the same questions to compare the results with one another. The design of the interview questions focused on being comprehensive enough to gather all relevant information about the phenomena under investigation (Tutty et al., 1996). Additionally, these questions were considered for their ability to allow participants to elaborate on their inner thoughts, reflecting their understanding of the past, and their experiences surrounding support from the high school counselor or social worker. It is by using a structured interview schedule where this researcher intends to capture understanding and interpretation using grounded theory analysis. The questions were designed with particular attention paid to meaning and clarity. Therefore, the researcher understands that individuals have varying subjective views of objects, situations, and people. The researcher has designed the interview schedule with an understanding that the more comprehensive the question the more depth and validity will emerge from the categories. Furthermore, it is the historic and social perspective each participant possesses that the researcher intends to capture for analysis. As described by Tutty et al. (1996),

“The qualitative research interviewer resembles a social work practitioner by encouraging the interviewee to express private thoughts and observations, recalling and reflecting on memories, by eliciting underlying emotions, and by listening closely to what is being said – and sometimes more importantly – what is not said (p. 59)”

The resulting theories and discoveries emerging from this study will be grounded in the participants own accounts of events, thoughts, and perceptions surrounding support from the counselor or social worker.
3.2 Definitions

-A-

American School Counseling Association (ASCA) — “ASCA’s mission is to represent professional school counselors and to promote professionalism and ethical practices” (American School Counseling Association, 2005).

Allied Stickers – Stickers and buttons promoting diversity.

American Psychological Association — “Based in Washington, DC, the American Psychological Association (APA) is a scientific and professional organization that represents psychology in the United States. With 150,000 members, APA is the largest association of psychologists worldwide” (American Psychological Association, 2005)

American Psychiatric Association — “The American Psychiatric Association is a medical specialty society recognized world-wide. Its over 35,000 U. S and international member physicians work together to ensure humane care and effective treatment for all persons with mental disorder, including mental retardation and substance-related disorders. It is the voice and conscience of modern psychiatry. Its vision is a society that has available, accessible quality psychiatric diagnosis and treatment” (American Psychiatric Association, 2005)

AVID – One participant had a group called AVID that was a private advancement for potentially underprivileged children that helped students prepare for college.

Axial Coding – In a qualitative grounded theory analysis, this is the step in the process after open coding where emerging data is put back together and relationships are identified (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

-B-

Bisexual - A person who is sexually attracted to both same sex and opposite sex individuals.

-C-

Core Category – In qualitative research grounded theory analysis, this is the central phenomenon where all other categories that emerge from the analysis are integrated (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Classification of mental disorders by the American Psychiatric Association.

Gay- a male who is homosexual sexually attracted to the same-sex. Gay can also mean both male and female who are homosexual depending upon how it is worded.

Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) – social groups found within the high school for those questioning or identifying as GLBT and their supporters.

GLBT – gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender

GLSEN – Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educational Network. – A support organization for teachers, parents, and students.

Grounded Theory – “is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (pp. 23)” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Heterosexual – a person whose sexual desires are directed to those of the opposite sex.

Homophobia – The fear of homosexuals, but is not a clinical term. Homophobia is the root of prejudice and discrimination based on a person’s sexual orientation.

Homosexuality – a male or female person whose sexual desires are directed to those of the same sex.

Hypotheses – statements of relationships.

In-Service Education – program of planned activities designed to increase knowledge, skills, and attitudes enabling school personal to be more effective.

Internal Validity – “The degree to which an effect observed in an experiment was actually produced by the experimental stimulus and not the result of other factors (pp. G-4)” (Rubin and Babbie, 2001).
Internalized Homophobia – When adolescents see homophobic attitudes, hate and discrimination against those believed to be homosexual; these adolescents will internalize that hate and point it towards themselves. This usually happens earlier in questioning their sexual identity.


Internet – the large global network of smaller computers and networks, which is used by Universities, Governments, Business, and Institutions for education, processing, and communication.

Interview Schedule – The list of questions that the interviewer will ask the participants.

-L-

Lesbian – a female who is homosexual; sexually attracted to same sex individuals.

-M-

Memoing – “written records of analysis related to the formulation of theory (pp. 197)” (Strauss and Corbin, 1991).

-N-

NASP - National Association of School Psychologists – “The National Association of School Psychologists represents and supports school psychology through leadership to enhance the mental health and educational competence of all children” (National Association of School Psychologists, 2005).

NASW - National Association of Social Workers – “The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world, with 153,000 members. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies” (National Association of Social Workers, 2005).

National Education Association – “The National Education Association (NEA) is the nation's largest professional employee organization and is committed to advancing the cause of public education. NEA's 2.7 million members work at every level of education, from pre-school to university graduate programs. NEA has affiliate organizations in every state, as well as in more than 14,000 local communities across the United States” (National Education Association, 2005).
Open Coding – in a qualitative grounded theory analysis, this is the step of categorizing groups of ideas through comparing and then putting into categories various conceptualized ways, (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Paradigm – “a model or frame of reference that shapes our observations and understandings (pp. G-6)” (Rubin and Babbie, 2001).

Phenomenon – In a qualitative grounded theory analysis, this is the main idea and can be an event, an incident, or a happening, where actions and interactions are directed at dealing with it, (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Psychometric Testing – ability, aptitude, and personality testing by school psychologist.

PFLAG – Parents and Friends of Gay and Lesbians. A National organization organized to help support parents and friends of GLBT individuals.

Qualitative Study – Research with results that are not from quantitative statistical procedures.

Quantitative Study – Research with results that are produced with statistical procedures, (Rubin and Babbie, 2001).

Questioning Adolescents – Adolescents who may be in the first stages of sexual identity formation, or who are questioning their sexual identity as either heterosexual or homosexual.

Rainbow Stickers – The six color flag with rainbow colors that is a symbol for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender population.

Reliability – “That quality of measurement method that suggests that the same data would have been collected each time in repeated observations of the same phenomenon (pp. G-7)” (Rubin and Babbie, 2001).

Selective Coding – This is the step in a grounded theory qualitative analysis where the core category is systematically related to the other categories. During this process,
validation of these emerging relationships is accomplished and if needed further refinement and development of categories are done (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Sexual orientation – Because gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals do not choose to their sexual identity, it is referred to as orientation, as opposed to choosing their sexual identity as a sexual preference, or choosing it as an alternative lifestyle.

Snowballing – Additional participants referred from those participants of a study (Rubin and Babbie, 2001).

Structural Interview – “sometimes called the standardized interview, uses a common interview schedule that contains specific questions, or items. Its rationale is to offer all interviewees approximately the same set of questions so that each person’s responses can be compared with one another” (Tutty, et al.,, 1996).

Transgender – Individuals whose gender identity differs from conventional expectations based on the physical sex they were born into, and the category includes transsexuals, transvestites, cross-dressers, and any other sub category that would fall under differing gender identity than what the person was born.

Validity – “A descriptive term used of a measure that accurately reflects the concept that it’s intended to measure (pp. G-9)” (Rubin and Babbie, 2001).

World Health Organization – established in 1948 as part of the United Nations, overseeing the International public health. The organization is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland (World Health Organization, 2005^2).

3.3 Sampling

Eligible participants for this study were persons 18 through 21 years of age who were students at The Ohio State University. Because of the difficulty in obtaining data directly from adolescents in high school, the 18 through 21 population is a good choice to
gain accurate accounts of the experiences related to high school counselor and social worker support. A limitation is that it is a retrospective look and the accurate recall of experiences and feelings of the participants could therefore be compromised. A second limitation is that the sample is small, but the researcher felt that all gaps were saturated during analysis. A third limitation is that the sample consisted of those students who attend The Ohio State University. There were no other participants sought outside the student population. There were four participants who identified as lesbian, four who identified as gay, and two females who identified as bisexual. There were no transgender students who offered to participate in the study. There were six participants who attended a suburban high school, three who attended an urban school, and one person attended a rural school. There were participants who attended high schools in California, Texas, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. Three participants graduated from high school in 2004, two in 2003, three in 2002, and two in 2001. Four participants had counselors at their high school, five had both psychologist and counselors, and one participant attended a school that had all three; a social worker, psychologist and counselor. The Ohio State University Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Student Services (GLBTSS) distributed information through their listserv email about the study. This information included who to contact about becoming a participant. Those interested in participating in the study were able to respond and arrangements for the interview were made. One participant was the result of the use of snowballing. Each participant received two AMC movie tickets for participating in the study. One participant refused the AMC movie tickets saying he was just happy to help with the study and felt it was important. All the participants were believed to be reliable providers of information for theory development.
3.4 Procedures

The researcher received approval to conduct the research on November 12, 2004, from The Ohio State Behavioral/Social Sciences Institutional Review Board. The researcher then proceeded to conduct one-on-one interviews. To enhance internal validity, each participant was chosen by his or her desire and commitment to the study, as well as the trust that each participant would give relevant and valid information. The researcher used an interview schedule (see attached Appendix A) and audiotaped those interviews with the consent of the participants. The audiotape was transcribed and stored on disc. Each participant was instructed to fill out a demographic questionnaire (see attached Appendix B) and sign The Ohio State University consent form. The consent form discussed the confidentiality of their interviews. Each interview took approximately 60 minutes, and they were conducted at the Multicultural Center, or the Music Library on campus. Reliability and validity were enhanced with the use of memoing; the process of writing down emerging ideas during the interview. The demographic questionnaire and consent form, which contained identifier information, was kept in a locked filing cabinet. The audiotapes, interview schedule, memoing notes, paper transcriptions and transcriptions on disc, all having an assigned identifier recorded from the demographic questionnaire, were kept in a separate locked filing cabinets. All collected data was returned to those participants that indicate they would like the data returned, otherwise this data was destroyed upon completion of the study.
3.5 Analysis

As Strauss and Corbin (1990) state, “theory uses concepts (p. 29).” In this research, data analysis was conducted looking for emerging themes leading to further discoveries, development of new themes, and verification of the existing knowledge. The steps, following the identification of the concepts and categories in open coding, included axial coding, which relate categories based on their dimensions with each concept, and selective coding to interpret the theories that emerged.

3.6 Data Analysis Process

The first step of the grounded theory analysis process was the use of the open coding process to identify categories by their properties and dimensions. During open coding an examination of sections of text revealed twenty-six categories. These categories, identified during the process of open coding, were represented by individual words, phrases, and sentences relevant to the research topic. The researcher looked at the dimensions, varying degrees found within a particular category, and it’s placement within a continuum. This systematic look, at the dimensional variations of a particular property, and its dimensions relevant to other categories, increased the density and understanding of each relevant concept or category. These categories were then labeled. The emphasis of this process was to allow as many concepts to emerge from the data as possible, and to be consistent in how the data were gathered to ensure relevance to the phenomena.
Additionally, the researcher paid particular attention to any new discoveries during this process, keeping relevant journal notes.

Following open coding, the use of the axial coding process was used to relate the categories to subcategories. Several important aspects of the axial coding process were kept in mind during this process, including for instance, the frequency of occurrence, and centrality of one category to the other, the logic of relationships to other categories, and the importance and understanding of how it contributed to relating these categories.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) clarify this further:

"we develop each category (phenomenon) in terms of the causal conditions that give rise to it, the specific dimensional location of this phenomenon in terms of its properties, the context, the action/interaction strategies used to handle, manage, respond to this phenomenon in light of the context, and the consequences of any action/interaction that is taken (pp. 114-115)."

The categories were then connected, through emerging relationships by statements.

These statements were analyzed for their causal conditions, strategies used to deal with the phenomenon, and the intervening conditions that shaped or affected the relationships with the categories. These relationships formed the even broader themes that emerged from this analysis.

The emphasis on relating causal conditions, during axial coding, relied upon the properties, describing the categories, and the actions/interactions surrounding the category relationships. The emphasis was on the sequences of the actions/interactions.

Secondly, it was important to remember, as further noted by Strauss and Corbin (1990)

"Purposeful, goal oriented, done for some reason – in response to or to manage a phenomenon. Therefore, it occurs through strategies and tactics. Though not all action/interaction is purposeful, it may be reflexive in some cases. Also, action/interaction may be taken for purposes unrelated to the phenomenon (p. 104)"
The third analytical process was the use of selective coding which systematically identified the core category, or central phenomenon, in relation to the other categories. The researcher validated those relationships, discovered new theory, and further substantiated existing theory. In grounded theory, this is the conceptualization of the story. This process of developing the theories that emerged, builds knowledge and understanding surrounding the research question. The use of paradigm building properties, using the conditions, context, action/interaction, and consequences, were used to relate categories to the central phenomenon. The dimensional levels of the categories were used to validate the relationships developed between the categories. In the case of this research, the core category was the contact experience with the counselor or social worker by participants who were questioning or identifying as GLBT in high school.

The researcher adhered to the four criteria of “the applicability of theory to a phenomenon (p. 23)” which Strauss and Corbin (1990) believe should guide grounded theory research of a particular phenomenon. These four criteria further ensured reliability and validity of the study. The first criterion is the principal of fit. It was looked at against the current knowledge and understanding in the research area. The second criterion, which follows along the same lines as fit, is the criterion of understanding. If the emerging data had understanding, it would then be able to be seen the same way, collectively, by those who are experts in the research area as well as those who were participants in the study. The movement from inductive to deductive thinking was based on a specific understanding. This understanding was that prior knowledge led to further statements of relationships emerging around the core category. The gathering
of data, through conducting interviews of GLBT college students, who as an adolescent questioned his or her sexual identity, then yielded further conceptual and broad theories and discoveries related to the prior knowledge base. This is the basis of the third criterion of generality. The resulting data gave rise to resulting discoveries related to the central phenomenon, and it produced important variation in relation to other contextual concepts. This process uncovered differences, which added to the variation and depth; both needed for better and further knowledge building. The fourth criterion was control. The emerging discoveries are the instruments of control. The researcher particularly concentrated on the central phenomenon as the controlling instrument. The knowledge of experts, specifically the collaborative data from tables 2.1 – 2.6, were compared and contrasted against the emerging discoveries, which led to consistent control, and further discoveries in the knowledge.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Participants Assessment of the School Environment

The first theme that emerged was the assessment of the school environment. While this is not an area directly related to the roles of the counselor or social worker, it is an important related theme. The participants described their school environment as being both heterosexist and homophobic. Therefore, an environment such as this affected their ability to want to seek out support from the counselor or social worker. As well, these participants felt the counselor or social worker, being an important part of the administration, could work with administrators proactively collaborating and striving for inclusion to eliminate the barriers caused by these prevailing attitudes. These participants wanted a school community that was (1) inclusive and (2) proactive when it came to issues for GLBT students.

Several of the participants discussed the lack of inclusion of GLBT issues in support service presentations. Other issues relevant to students were discussed such as alcohol use and eating disorders, but GLBT issues were missing from the services

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offered. They felt that information about GLBT issues should have been incorporated into the presentations by the counselors and social workers.

They might have had services available... in fact I think they do for GLBT questioning teens, but because they never came right out and said it... that probably discourages a lot of people.... Especially people who weren't having any kind of major trauma about it from seeking guidance.

I mean there were those items, and they did have some of those things but it wasn't full .... You know I don't remember if they mentioned it or not, but I know it wasn't 10 percent of the time which it should have been.

They came right out and told us before anyone even asked if you're having trouble with alcohol, if you're having trouble with eating disorders, if you're having troubles with abuse we've got services for that, you know they told us that in health classes and at assemblies and that kind of thing, you know we have pamphlets and we have and you know you can go to the nurse or you can go to the psychologist or whatever and we can help you with that, we can get you a support group, we can get you whatever help you need, those were never services I needed.

We would maybe have two things put on by the counseling services during the year and one was the safe sex talk and one was a um don't drink and drive.

I remember having people talk about breast cancer things I mean we always had these little information sessions forced onto the class and I think if that were part of it... it might have... it might have helped a lot, because while you know you may reach a few of us in the closet and you may educate the others just a little bit, so I think that would have been good.

Seven out of the ten participants felt that their counselors or social workers, as well as administrators and teachers ignored GLBT issues.

They just never talked about it ...it is like they would change the subject.

They were not pro GLBT in any way...the only person that there was .. only one person on the administration who did, and there were several teachers, but there was nobody... nobody on the counseling staff would, just automatically.... I feel like they could have gone to bat more for the GLBT community.

I think there are a lot of issues for which they could have been a lot more proactive in saying.. our school is a positive.. well you know we want to create a positive I went to a Catholic high school so I'm not sure if they were officially
told they were not supposed to talk about homosexuality and things like that.... This might be me stereotyping.. she was always very nice but never like including

I feel that just being more open about it or something like that would have been better....It just needed to be... it just needed to be more.. brought up more....There was never ever any discussion about that.....Start you know talking more and more about it

Probably just to bring up the issues

Just um, they never really talked about it, it was always pushed aside

If she just brought up a more personal thing... then I think I might have been able to open up, and say like .... Something... I don’t think I would have been afraid to actually talk to her about it..

She never really asked like anything about homosexuality, I don’t remember, she just er asked me about like the harassment deal, it was very short too, she just wanted, like... she ... I ... remember it not being very long she just wanted to know what happened, what I wanted to do about it, and go from there, I was like in and out, which I did not like either because I didn’t feel like I could try to explain it.......You never really heard about it a lot, um in my school um GLBT issues never... they weren’t a big thing a lot of times, they were pushed aside

Several other participants felt that their school environment was not open to GLBT issues.

A lot of the teachers and faculty and stuff at the school just came off as really conservative and they wouldn’t approve if you sat down and tried to talk to them about it ....I never really felt like um in my school that GLBT issues were like something that was safe to bring up.....It was always a really big deal if someone was gay... they totally just cut you off from everyone ....I don’t know what the whole mind set was... I don’t know I don’t understand what the big deal is and I still.. like i never go home anymore just because that whole town is ridiculous, they’re so... so far behind everything else

Yes, so like the administrative being, like the administration being so negative on it, just... I mean that just put in my mind like... I mean I never really thought about it I guess, but it was all in the back of my mind and when I actually had to deal with it and talk to a counselor... I just... I kinda figured it wasn’t going to be the easiest task

I came from a school that was more of a farming community... so a lot of times people made fun and all that stuff
I was in like a suburban high school and it was fairly conservative so like it probably wouldn’t be the best idea to come out to the entire high school

I live about 20 minutes outside the city but it’s so like hardcore.....The teachers they were very formal.. and um they’re all really nice, but since it’s high school, with the bureaucracy of the whole system you just have to keep the students at an arms length you can’t really get into conversation that

This school was not very open to it, it was very new to the school....the students would like give different like gay slurs if that’s what you want to call it um towards me and say different things um, yea right in class, sitting right beside me while the teacher is talking, it was an English class, she was just going away, and I was just so perplexed because the students would be louder than the teacher

A few of the participants felt that the acceptance found within their school environment was mixed on GLBT issues.

We had some parts of the administration that were just extremely supportive of starting a GLBT group... other teachers and other people in in authority and semi-authority, or thought they were authority figures, who were not at all supportive

Our school was divided on this type of thing too

My high school was very different than a lot of them, we um didn’t have anybody really that was open about being gay

A few of the participants felt that there was a underlying heterosexist attitude found within the school system towards GLBT issues and students.

Well I mean I wouldn’t say they’re not going against it... it’s not like saying you know they’re gay friendly and they weren’t or saying we hate gay people and they were friendly, it was just almost like an aggressive neutrality... um I think that would be the best term for it

We weren’t really gay friendly. I mean.. I mean we weren’t like gay haters but you know we weren’t gay friendly

Additionally, these participants discussed wanting administrators, including counselors and social workers, to be more proactive towards situations affecting GLBT students. Two of the participants wanted to see the counselor or social worker more
involved in creating a more accepting community that was less heterosexist and homophobic.

Create situations that are less heterosexist and homophobic... again, I don't know if that would be the place for social workers in that school .... I personally think that there should be at least one person in each school that is paid a salary to build and create a community.

I think just really a more open and accepting community at the whole school because um I didn't like having to um stay quiet like when people would say things, because I didn't feel quite safe... So the biggest issue was just more acceptance in the whole community which I think you know was a thing the guidance counselor could do by doing different programs or stopping people when they would say homophobic things whether they were students or teachers

The participant who found acceptance from her counselor, who was a Catholic Brother, felt that her school was accepting.

I was like when people say they went to Catholic high school, they say oh gosh so stuffy and so conservative, it was never GLBT people are going to hell, it was never these people are bad people it was actually you know these people are part of the world and they are part of the diversity of God

She also felt her counselor advocated for protecting gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students.

He was the first teacher or counselor to kinda I could see advocate for those issues

He was very much kinda on the foreground in making sure, or protecting us I think

Three of the participants discussed the problem of openly homophobic comments made by teachers and students.

On occasion you would get really homophobic comments that people would say, so it really wasn't very open to want to go and talk to the counselor about that at all [who would make the homophobic comments] More the teachers and the students of course. I don't think I ever heard any counselors say one
People thinking that I was, I didn’t necessarily tell them that I was or anything like that, but students like to make fun and do things and.. I wasn’t really comfortable myself being who I was at that certain time... and the students a lot like um, they always... I always got picked on a lot um, beginning of the school year rather, like when I was a freshman and sophomore. later on when I came out it was less bad.

I started becoming more aware of like issues and things... The way people use language like the way.. like the word gay and word fag are used as like derogatory.. like words basically... that kind of bothered me.. you know...... There students, I mean like teachers you know don’t talk... really talk like that, they don’t discourage either and like sometimes I wonder if they should.

A few participants had stated their teachers were aware of the homophobic comments or allowed them to happen. They also discussed the camaraderie between the counselors, teachers, and administrators. Their perceptions of one affected the attitudes of the other. A few of the participants seem to see counselors, teachers, and administrators as one when it came to the issues surrounding GLBT students.

Yea because they are all friends cause it wasn’t too big of a school and they all hung out together

This is the way the school district has been forever and and not going... not going to deal with it anymore, um they weren’t about that

These were the counselors, and also the administrators..... the same way

Several participants discussed the lack of GLBT role models found in the teachers, counselors, and administrators. One participant discussed his perception of a counselor whom he thought was gay and how it helped him with his identity development;

considering the counselor an indirect role model.

I could just see you know he was in a suite and tie every day, but he was flamboyant but he seemed quote unquote normal like a normal adult professional male... and so I guess that was kinda good, kinda like... like you know I could see on the side you know like gay men can be professional

He wasn’t a direct role model, but an indirect role model.
I kinda wished that I would have been an N thru Z but you know cause I probably would have been able to talk…. [students were assigned by the first letter of their last name]

I guess I saw that, I guess you could be gay and still be a professional

But, I guess just seeing that helped that he helped me out [gay counselor]

Another participant discussed what affect a gay or lesbian teacher or administrator would have at his school.

We don’t have enough teachers in public high schools um or middle schools that are gay or that will fight for gays, that’s the real problem that we have… because if we had that it would change everything with the people, if there was a school board member that was you know gay it would change everything

He went on to suggest having group meetings where one of the panel members was gay or lesbian.

Who’s just like an all around a good person, you know that people are going to say hey he’s motivated and he’s dedicated or she’s motivated or she’s dedicated you know they’re open about their lives you know and that would I honestly think that would solve a lot of problems

Another participant discussed the lack of gay or lesbian counselors and his desire to have a gay or lesbian adult support person during high school.

I think most of the reason it wasn’t touched upon because A. I mean their main goals was still academic stuff and B nobody on the staff was…. was a you know lesbian or gay man or anything like that

The participant, assigned a Catholic Brother as her counselor, felt the possibility that he could be gay was both lucky and helpful.

It’s kinda rumored like oh maybe he’s gay… me just having that little bit in the back of my head was… I always thought of that’s kind of lucky… [did that help] I think it did a lot

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She further discussed how she felt about the possibility that her counselor as well as a math teacher could possibly be gay or lesbian.

In actuality I don't think either one of them were, but in your head.. that these people may have something in common with me.. helps a great deal

4.2 Participants Assessment of the Counselor and Social Worker

After assessing the school environment for inclusion, a separate, but important category emerged. This was the assessment of the school counselor or social worker related to support. Five themes emerged, directly related to assessing the counselor or social worker's approachability, which affected the amount of contact they had with the counselor or social worker: (1) trustworthiness, (2) non-judgmental, (3) open and accepting, (4) familiarity with a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender person, (5) and educated and knowledgeable about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues. Additionally, the participants expressed a fear that if they opened up to the counselor or social worker they would be (6) rejected, (7) ostracized, (8) their parents could find out, (9) there would be a stigma attached to seeking support, and (10) they would be viewed as pathological. For several participants it was just the inability to know who would be trustworthy.

I have a hard time picking and choosing who to talk to in high school teacher wise and otherwise

[You never felt like you could trust the counselor?] No not really

Another participant who had the counselor with the PFLAG sticker displayed stated
me being able to fully put all my trust in him, ... is what enabled me to when I needed help later to seek it. And so.. that's good....I often look back you know at my time in his office and talking to him was kinda the part that jump started me being me instead of me being the person that I was trying to be so everybody would like me...

She went on to state

Knowing that he wouldn't go to the school, he wouldn't do this and that it didn't really matter what I came to him with, he listened....I think that good experience with him, I feel a lot of gratitude to him

Several participants expressed the concern of being judged by the counselor or social worker.

I guess like maybe like I would have wondered if I talked to like my personal guidance counselor if they would have like thought differently of me, which seems doubtful, but I mean like it's kinda impersonal like doing scheduling with them and stuff, it's like really the only time that I saw them

I don't feel like she really listened to that part that I was trying to express, and at the same time I don't know it was kinda hard for me to express exactly what I was feeling on the other hand as well, because at the same time I didn't know how she would like think of me....... And so like... like the bi part... Like I have... it's really weird telling people I don't know like complete strangers I have no problem talking about my sexuality, but telling people I know... that I know aren't exactly the most open minded people in the world, it's just like okay I'm going to go away from you now... the fear of judgment ....main point that like any counseling needs to get across.. if you ever need someone to talk to you no matter what there's no judgment here

Another participant described going to his counselor for the first time when he was physically harassed by another student. He felt he was judged by her actions and response.

No, she was like... it was... I felt like I was kinda quick judged.... I mean I couldn't get... like I ...I don't know I feel like I couldn't express myself fully
One participant perceived that her counselor or social worker would have been there for her, if she had been harassed by other students in a similar situation.

I think like I might not necessarily gone to them because I was questioning, but if I felt that I had ... was having personal issues with the student body or with teachers because of my sexual identity or the sexual identity of my friends then I may have gone to the guidance counselors because like I think like part of the thing with those guidance counselors is if you’re having problem with specific people like they can kinda like tell you what to do, and then also if necessary they can talk to those people was well, they can negate

Another participant described an incident when the counselor brought up her sexual identity. The participant was not comfortable in discussing it with this particular counselor, but she did not perceive the counselor as being judgmental.

I wasn’t shocked when she asked me, but I think I was more shocked that she thought to ask me more than just the fact that she asked me period, ... I just didn’t feel comfortable talking about it with her. ... I wasn’t ready to deal, and like... I felt a little bit, but I felt there was more like that she felt like I was confused........I like... I knew she wasn’t judging me it’s just like I didn’t like... I didn’t feel comfortable with her, .. she wasn’t .. like she wasn’t .. she didn’t seem like a judgmental person like at all

Acceptance was another support need that participants wanted from the counselor or social worker as GLBT students.

I like to assume that the guidance counselors like out of like all the faculty and the school are probably like the more accepting and receptive to issues of students cause that’s basically what their job is about

I figure what I want out of them is like I think that like it should be easy for me to come in and even if I don’t tell em that I’m gay, or like even if I am not comfortable talking about it, they should be able to like be more understanding

Well it wasn’t like... I ... like the counselors had been more warm and inviting it would have been great, but they didn’t

One participant described his feeling about going to the counselor and worrying about being rejected.
I was scared they’d just be like oh we can’t help you, or they would push me away... or... like nothing would happen, which basically what happened, and I mean like, not the fact so much like that, but just like the rejection of the counselor I guess you could say

Another participant did not care about what the counselors thought of him. This participant was very open and honest about whom he was in high school, and it was because of the lack of concern, exhibited by the counselors over homophobic slurs written on his posters, that he did not look to the counselors for any support.

No, I wouldn’t care less what my counselors thought of me, they really did jack shit for me

The participant who attended the Catholic high school had built a relationship with her counselor because he displayed a PFLAG and rainbow sticker, but she still had fears of being ostracized when first approaching him for support.

I was worried about being ostracized a bit.....I am just not the type of person who like to walk around and be known like walk down the hall you know and everybody from you know freshman to senior oh that’s the lesbian or you know like these things, I didn’t want it to be that I’d end up sitting alone at lunch

One other participant expressed the fear of being affected adversely.

Not having to worry that if I came and spoke to them, they would react badly .....they would tell other people or that it would end up somehow affecting me adversely..... The most important thing to me would have been not being afraid of them

Several participants worried about their parents finding out if they had talked to the counselor.

If I went and talked to him and they talked to my parents and then my parents would find out
The whole thing about talking to the counselor after going through the GLBT stuff, all the depression stuff would come up and like that like correlated with my fear of having my parents find out.

I was extremely worried about, my mom is the oldest of eleven of a big Catholic family and I know for certain that if it got around to everybody at least at the time, it would like... it would have caused major commotion within my family.

Another participant talked about the stigma attached to talking with her counselor or social worker about her sexual identity.

I mean and part of it again, the stigma itself or whatever, even if it was negated would be... even if it was unfounded in that school, the stigma of mental health care..... of receiving it but also the stigma of mental health care providers have of trying to cure...

She goes on to describe her thoughts about approaching her counselor or social worker with questioning her sexual identity versus identifying as lesbian; the concern about the counselor possibly viewing her identity in more pathological terms. This caused her fear.

Going to a counselor and saying I’m gay I probably would be fine with, going to a counselor and saying I am questioning I think putting myself back in that life that I might have been afraid that they would have tried to push me in one direction or another, or push me to depths of myself that I wasn’t comfortable in going, would they have done that probably not, but that was my fear at the time, Again, I don’t think on any active level I thought if I went to my high school counselor they were going to try to cure me of my homosexuality that might have existed.

She further describes her perceptions of what the experience with her counselor or social worker could have been.

It might have been something really positive, it might have been something a little more how do we cure you, how do you deal with your horrible disability... you know, I don’t know which way direction.... Or it could have been something really positive, I don’t know...

This participant stated that she believed that the counselor or social worker tends to look at things in a very problem-solving manner.
Another participant also expressed concern of opening up to the counselor and being viewed in terms that are more pathological.

You've got those counselors out there that goes we can cure you of not being gay... I guess as a younger person and you see everyone trying to convert you back from being gay like I just didn't want to have to be.. like force myself to go through that if I ended up getting a counselor who thought oh well you know... that's not natural. Yea that's not, that's not natural you should not do that.

4.3 Contact Experience with Counselor or Social Worker

The central phenomenon related to counselor and social worker support was the amount of contact participants had with their counselor or social worker for support. All of the participants, except for one, had very little or no contact with their counselor or social worker for any reason, especially about GLBT issues. Six sub categories emerged related to having no contact. (1) The counselors were not perceived as helpful, or they were only perceived as helpful with serious or traumatic needs. (2) The participant was not comfortable with the counselor. (3) The participants just did not consider the counselors for support. (4) The participant perceived the counselor or social worker to be academic advisors only. (5) The participant did not need the counselor for support. (6) and the participant was not ready to talk to someone about the issue. Additionally, one participant developed a good support relationship with her counselor, and a few participants had a negative experience with their counselors.

Several of the participants expressed the feeling that talking with the counselor would not have been helpful.
Like going then didn’t seem like great....I really didn’t think that it would be helpful

I really didn’t want to go.. to them.. they didn’t seem like the option that would be most helpful

Oh they were not helpful at all

It was just because she seemed so incompetent that I didn’t even want to bother with her

I don’t think they helped me or hurt me. They were just kind of there

I felt like there was nobody I could go to, I felt like even that.. like I could go to them, but that was like nothing, like I didn’t feel like they benefit me at all....

Three of the participants stated that they would have only talked with the counselor if they had a “serious” or “traumatic” need for help.

I wouldn’t go talk to them unless I had... was in serious need of help like I wouldn’t go and talk to them just for day to day kind of I feel down kind of stuff

I guess if I would have had a really traumatic situation I would have

I don’t think about reasons to go to the guidance counselor, like I kinda think about like having like a serious problem you know like... like for example like child abuse

Several other participants described their comfort level with talking with the counselor.

I think a lot of people initially when they think of questioning it, counseling is like the last thing they want to do......just seemed like not in my best interest... going to the counselor

I don’t know the counselors didn’t come off as really friendly, that might have been part of it too, that when I go talk to someone about personal issues, I have to feel like that they are on the same level as me and that they are willing to sit there and listen like a friend

It was like a process of elimination, start here and go, like I was referred to a counselor because of how I was acting and they referred me to the nurse, and like both of them they were older, but that was okay, and they talked, and they were really nice, but they didn’t seem like they would be really open
One participant indicated feeling less comfortable to talk about issues surrounding sexual identity.

I never felt like I was comfortable enough to talk to somebody.....No, I didn’t feel like I could talk to them.......I never felt like I could really go talk to a counselor or someone

This same participant, when talking with his counselor as a freshman, wanted to bring up issues about questioning his sexual identity, but he never found enough courage to bring it up.

Sometimes I would go and like talk about other issues, but really I mean this was always like the underlying issue that I would never say anything about... Well like I said I wasn’t really comfortable with it, um, I debated doing it a couple of times but never actually ended up going to talk with them ... I was a freshman

Another participant did not feel comfortable not knowing if the counselor was gay affirming or not.

People who were just kind of stressed out about this um how do I know about the gay thing, might not want to put themselves, you know, that in.. of its self is so stressful of a situation that it’s worth the stress of.....finding out whether or not your school’s counselors are gay popular

Another respondent did not feel comfortable talking to the counselor because of the perception of being unapproachable. He stated

She seemed like a very.. um I don’t want to say conservative, but she just seemed like a traditional mom kind of person... So I didn’t talk to her about anything that would... to her about any personal issues

Several participants stated that they never went to, or considered, the counselor or social worker for support.

I never ever went to a counselor for anything

I don’t know if I ever thought to go and talk to them
I never sought out um ….. assistance from them

Several of the participants held the perception that their counselor was seen mostly as an academic counselor.

I more really thought of um guidance counselors like at least in my school it seemed there more emphasis on things like scheduling and college applications

I went for grades and scheduling but nothing that dealt with like harassment

I went to like an all prestigious medical high school where it was all academics academics….. academics…. Like the response would be like oh you should concentrate on school right now…

Counselors which were basically are your advising academic counselors

One participant eventually felt comfortable enough to open up about her personal concerns related to her identity even though her initial perception was that the counselor was there for academic issues. This participant started out apprehensive, but a relationship of acceptance and trust developed.

My counselor was a Brother, a Catholic Brother, within.. and ah , so I wasn’t quiet sure you know being a religious order if he would be the right person to tell ……..I guess I never went to him before my junior or senior year… I don’t have humongous problems at home or I wasn’t getting into trouble and so other than academic things I had no real need, at least in my head, to go there and so, um, so when I went there to begin with, I was going on a purely academic … you know like I am getting ready for college which I do type of thing… and through getting him to know that him through that process which is him genuinely taking an interest…….. Going in with academics and things like that he was really extremely helpful and I started looking forward to telling him things

A few participants expressed that talking to the counselor or social worker was something they did not need for support.

I didn’t feel like it was that big of a deal that I needed outside help from somebody I didn’t know
I didn’t think I ever really need to. I mean right when I first coming out... but I didn’t want... other than... a guy/girl friend which I did then, the counselor or advisor

Another participant stated that at that time, he did not need the adult support, such as a counselor or social worker, but he felt that by having that support, it would have had a more positive effect on his development, eliminating the need to suppress his feelings.

So I didn’t need that adult person, but it would have been a lot nicer because then I would have been more comfortable knowing that an adult thought I was normal.... It would have been nice because then, she would have... I would have felt normal, because at that time I just thought like this quote unquote is like a defect that I had, and so, like you know I could always work on it... you know, what I mean, or suppress it or whatever

Several other participants did not feel that they were ready to talk with someone else, including the counselor or social worker, about questioning their sexual identity.

I’m not ready to do this yet, like I’m not ready to go and sit down and look somebody in the face and tell them that I am gay.... But um, yea, I just didn’t feel comfortable at all

Actually I didn’t talk to too many people about it... It was one of those things I just kind of debated about myself, which was weird cause I don’t know...I don’t know it’s just one of those things I kind of kept to myself a lot of times

I just didn’t want to talk to anybody about it

I never... yea I never really talked to the guidance counselors about it

I think maybe um if it’d been like right in the beginning of my freshman year I might not have been comfortable with it yet, just since I was kinda uncertain. But, um like eventually I became like very like comfortable in my own identity

I wasn’t either willing or able to articulate that to a counselor

Several of the participants had bad experiences with the counselor or social worker that further hindered turning to the counselor for subsequent support. For instance, one participant approached the counselor about homophobic slurs having been
written on his school posters in the hallway. When the counselors did not want to address the issue, or take it seriously, this participant stated,

After um that I pretty much avoided them at all cost

Another participant had contact with her counselor and social worker to help start a gay straight alliance. When the counselors wanted to provide a support group instead of a gay straight social group this participant, and her peers, decided they did not want the counselors involved. She stated

Only near interaction I had with social services at that time was um... decided to start a GLBT kinda um group, a GSA type thing .... After they offered us social work as a like replacement for a cultural or social group, we pretty much said we want social work no where near us like because that had been their first response and we had interpreted as them calling us or gay people sick

Another participant approached his counselor to file a formal complaint about having been approached from behind and had a derogatory “physical contact type thing” instigated by one classmate in front of several others. He felt like the counselor wanted to hurry him out of her office instead of addressing the issue. She encouraged him to talk to the assailant instead of filing an incident report. This participant wanted an incident report filed. When a similar harassment happened again later, a teacher stepped in and called the police to make an incident report. His comments about the counselors involvement with this issue was

There was only one that I could think of that I would... I would feel comfortable talking too, and ended up talking to her at one time, but she was no help whatsoever, it was very... it was really bad actually

I went to talk to her, actually it’s sort of but you could say that or sexual harassment um or being a homosexual, or people thinking that I was... she was addressing it, but she was trying to like not address the whole GLBT issue, she was just trying to address like that... she kept pushing for me to go talk to him as
well even though I was pushing to like actually get one of those incident reports filled...filed or whatever, and I I was harassed in school, and the student knows this in front of other student like especially being a homosexual in a school where it's not accepted... at you know any length really... and so I know I wouldn't go back

Another participant perceived that the counselor felt sorry for her parents because they had a daughter who was questioning her sexual identity. She based this on the attitude and response to seeking support from this counselor.

My parents not still talking to me very much, like they were barely talking, there was a point in time when my mom wouldn't touch me for like... I think for like almost a year, ......I went there with the intentions of like how to get my parents to talk to me again......They understood that my parents weren't talking to me, and I think that they kind of, this is going to sound really bad, but I feel like they kinda felt bad for my parents, like oh what a terrible thing to have happen to you and I'm sorry

One participant talked about how he went into the counseling office with a non GLBT related problem and the counselors just assumed it was gay related.

I don't even think it was like gay related, they all thought it was gay related me coming out and I was like no I think I am just going like in a rut right now ......I think they immediately assumed that it was my gayness and honestly, I think that I just was just... I just had no idea what was going on in my life not because not because I was gay, like I had come out almost a year prior to that.... I think they were they were trying to gear me towards the whole gay issue....but the counselors shouldn't just zero in on that and they need to be more open to other things

One participant was able to open up and approach her counselor regarding her issues with questioning her sexual identity. The openness of this relationship, between the counselor and student, developed because the counselor, a Catholic Brother, displayed a PFLAG and rainbow sticker on his bulletin board in his office. It was because of these stickers that the student felt comfortable enough to approach the counselor. She states

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I told my counselor was the first actual person I ever told... he was really helpful and then as soon as I approached the subject with him he was really good.

Another participant only had contact with her counselor because he taught her senior religion class. This was a class where one of the assignments was for the students to plan their weddings to learn about finances. This participant did not have a bad experience with her counselor, she stated:

I think um, the most contact I had specifically with GLBT issues with my counselor was um actually he taught one of my classes my senior year... he always um you know fairly open to discussing it cause he was a pretty nice guy.

In addition, she felt like the guidance counselors were probably very accepting.

Three participants summed up their frustration about having no support and dealing with several issues, including those issues of questioning their sexual identity.

It was never mentioned.

I had no way to deal with it at all.

What hindered I think in some sense, I think it was hindered in a little bit, that because of either society or the times in my earlier high school, even though I knew I was gay, there was no outlet for anything about... you know at the time I didn’t really have anybody I could go to at school at least.....I just remember as a freshman I had no idea even if I wanted to tell someone who I would go to.

4.4 Identity Kept a Secret

The next theme to emerge from this research was the description by several of the participants that their questioning or sexual identity was a secret. What was found in the
research is that most of these participants were not willing to discuss their sexual identity development issues while in junior high and freshman years of high school. The participants assessed the school environment and they assessed their comfort level in approaching the counselors and social workers, and they decided that any contact with the counselor or social worker about concerns with their sexual identity development would not have found acceptance. Additionally, most of the participants did not feel comfortable with opening up to their parents. This left the participants feeling isolated and therefore they felt that their identity needed to be kept as a secret.

It was a secret because I don’t think I was willing to admit it to myself yet, not because not because I didn’t want other people so much but because I wasn’t ready to settle down and say yea I like boys

Because you don’t want to go tell your secret... you know if it is a secret and then have to deal with all the consequences of that

Because it’s very discreet, it’s very discreet... and then once you’re comfortable with it you don’t have to be discreet

I think maybe um if it’d been like right in the beginning of my freshman year I might not have been comfortable with it yet, just since I was kinda uncertain. But um like eventually I became like very like comfortable in my own identity, and like I am fairly comfortable person like when it comes to like myself and what I think and what I believe

I pretty much just didn’t talk to anyone my... almost my whole freshman year, and then it wasn’t until like June, after my freshman year, like right before I got my drivers license that I started dating this guy, and then it’s pretty much where I went after that... I didn’t really talk to friends, I really didn’t do anything, and I kept it all inside... I felt very isolated, yea, I didn’t feel like I had anybody that I could talk too

It’s really frustrating... yea well, I tried to hide it from certain people, like I didn’t want my parents to find out and my family

Yea, it was really really hard growing up just not being able to do anything about it... I mean I’m still dealing with the fact that I don’t have to just keep quiet about it anymore.... Trying to keep it from anyone from finding out... I mean there
were certain people that I told, when I graduated I told more and more people but I mean there were certain people I was trying to hide it from

Keep it to myself.. this is my own little secret... I had to deny a lot of it, a lot of times.. It’s just like a combination of things, like the judgment, the fear, the fear of my friends not liking me anymore, the fear of my parents going you need to get the hell out of our house, like just the fear of everything and I think its honestly because and like you can’t blame the media for everything, but like seeing so many different things like people when they were discriminated against, people when their family disowned them after finding out stuff like that... like after seeing people going through that, it’s hard for you to want to just finally like realize and just be like okay great that’s what I am let’s deal with it.... [was it hard to keep that in high school to keep that going without wanting to talk to a counselor or social worker?] it really was

I think it’s because it used to be just so.. oh well it’s still so secretive

One participant discussed the excitement in being able to meet other adolescents in

Internet chatrooms who were like him, and he was able to make a connection therefore giving up the secret.

It was... I think it was very exciting um not exciting because because I had a secret life you know it wasn’t anything like that it was exciting because I was like oh okay yea.. you know ...you .....there was just like this connect like okay I have made a connection

4.5 Available Support Utilized

A sub category of keeping their identity a secret emerged from this research, revealing the available support that was utilized by these participants. As discussed by Munoz-Plaza et al. (2002), there are four types of social support constructed from four types of behaviors.

“1) emotional support in the form of love, caring, trust, listening and other similar affective behaviors; 2) appraisal support in the form of positive feedback
or affirmation; 3) instrumental support in the form of a tangible resource or aid, including money, labor, time, and barter; and 4) informational support in the form of advice or suggestions. Mercier and Berger (1989) point to the lack of readily available support systems – at home, in the community, and in the educational system – as the cause of the social isolation that many LGBT youth experience.”

School counselors and social workers should be involved in providing different levels of emotional, appraisal, and informational support to all students within the school system, but because of the absence of this support, participants utilized four alternative support types for their emotional, appraisal, and information support. Early in adolescences, they used the Internet and public library for informational support. Additionally, the Internet chatrooms were also used for emotional and appraisal support. Their Internet use continued through high school, and when they reached their Junior and Senior years of high school they had friends and a teacher who was an indirect role model for emotional and appraisal support.

The literature does not address the use of the Internet as a support avenue used by adolescents who are questioning or identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. The main reason this has not emerged in prior research is that the Internet did not actually become a common household communication tool until around the mid to late 1990’s. Therefore, the participants in this study are one of the first to have grown up with the Internet. Nine out of the ten participants used the Internet to find resources and information surrounding gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender culture. Additionally, several were able to use the Internet to find other adolescents that were going through similar social and family experiences, therefore breaking down some of the isolation that was felt at that time. Below they describe this phenomenon.
Internet especially provided a place for me to know lots of people who were gay or bisexual or were straight but you know very open very um aware of things and who were very friendly ....there's almost not a heterosexist attitude at all were even regular comments you don't think about like are you... do you have a boyfriend now won't even get said it will automatically be are you dating anyone ...[Where did you get your support] I'd say the Internet... more than any people; I actually interacted with on a daily basis ..... [What if you wouldn't have had the Internet for support] oh much worse

I think it's really good for for people that are younger, I have always thought that I think it's you know its really a good way for them to talk to other people, if there aren't people around them. It's good resource, it... it makes it so much easier for people I believe..... When you would meet people online, you'd be like oh you have a common interest you know you're normal and so it would make it a lot easier... [Where did you get your support] First I would say that when I had the confusion issue or whatever I was just wasn't able to admit it to myself first, it was like random people I met online ....[Did the Internet give you support that you needed]I really think it did, I honestly feel that online is very good for a lot of people

You're anonymous you don't worry and so I had freedom to go to these lesbian chatrooms and see these others chatrooms and I just met friends and just started talking to them on a regular basis and it actually turned out to be... I think that's why I wasn't having so much problems in my life because I was able to come home I could get on the computer and talk to my friends .....we got Internet I think oh probably my sophomore year... soon as we got it I started talking to people in these chatrooms ....I talk like not only to talk to kids, who were just like, oh man that sucks I am sorry your parents are being you know...or whatever, but um gay kids who were going through the same thing, especially one's in my area ......I went on the Internet... found people who were like oh I'm so sorry and we'll talk about it, and then I talked to them....[Where did you get your support] I didn't end up telling anybody... I had friends on the Internet and that type of thing, but they didn't know me .....[how important was that to you, the Internet] very actually

My dad works for like a computer company so we had the Internet since hardcore beginning, like 1992, 1993 so I mean like free Internet usage, in my life I can remember being able to sit at the computer for however long I wanted and look at you know whatever I wanted, little did I know that you know you can look at everything I had looked at you know... I later then met the person I have been dating for the last two years, and I'm like you know really close with on the Internet

I definitely like started going to chatrooms and stuff when I was like in 7th grade... definitely a way for me to talk to people... I talked to so many people
that were like so encouraging... I met people I will never know, people I’ve never met, that... I mean I can’t even remember half their names... so many people just told me you know what I mean one day things will be alright, you won’t have to worry about these issues anymore... see I would have people I could talk to, but I still wasn’t... really good about talking to people... so I think that definitely helped me...[how important was that to you, the Internet] I don’t think I would have made it through what I made it through without the help of being able to talk to people like that I’d probably be a lot worse off because that was like my outlet...

I could go into a chatroom, that was the only... that was the only way I ever was...gay... I guess it was my outlet for being gay... I was able to chat with guys... you know I was able to say like oh so what kind of things do you like to do and I was able to have normal conversations with guys and flirt with guys which I never would’ve... would have done... like I couldn’t make gay comments or say he’s cute except for my friend but my senior year he had graduated... you know he had graduated at the end of my junior year so prior to that [Do you think the Internet helped you with support] yea because it was my only way... I could go into a chatroom and see things what guys were actually talking to each... saying to each other like oh that guy’s hot... that guy’s hot and stuff like that I could talk... have conversations with people and so it kind of eliminated the... the uncomfortableness...

I just... I didn’t know what was going on and before I even talked to these people um because I started realizing it actually in middle school um and I just thought it was something you grew out of, that was funny, never grew out of it, but um so, but like I um I looked at some things on the Internet and um just to like research a little bit about it, I mean that sort of helped because like I knew there were a lot of things out there because I mean you put gay and like on search and you’d come up with a whole bunch of different stuff, like I didn’t even know what I was searching for, but I mean I did find PFLAG and different things like that, I never did go to any of those, but not tell later, until... After I met my friends, um but I figure I would have probably had to go on to somebody outside of school or something outside of school, and outside my family to find help just to be able to deal with everything, all the pressure and everything like that

I did turn to the Internet a lot... it helped a lot... I was out there a lot... I used a lot of like resources that were there... [Was the Internet a support] It really was cause like while you’re on the Internet it was just more okay you’re not the only person thinking you’re crazy... it helped a lot... the Internet helps a lot, cause like you can meet people and they can go from being strangers to being someone that can completely understand you in like two seconds... it’s like no different than meeting someone like on the street, and like all of a sudden you guys connect and like you’re good friends but like it’s no different than that, it’s just you can’t technically see the person at the moment... there were like little chatrooms or
whatever, and I just joined like little groups or whatever, and like they just talk and they’ll be like... It was actually good... I also know there are people out there don’t have like that network, and like the only thing I can think of, and honestly if you just turn to the Internet there are so many like before... like before like now with the Internet you have all these different connections that people make there’s so much more you can do... [What if you wouldn’t have had the internet] if I hadn’t had it, I’d probably be a wreck like honestly... like if I had cause like not having experiences I can see why people wouldn’t want to be out more and go out into the community and seek help because like it can be really scary like to just go out... like you’d be literally on your own

[Talking about the Internet] To make real friends with people who sometimes were my age or sometimes were older or sometimes were younger, but who were just open and who it wasn’t a big deal at all with

Some of the participants found books and magazines to be a resource for learning more about gay and lesbian culture. A few participants talked about going to the public library.

I could you know read all the things I wanted too, I.... you know.. I would go to the library a lot and get books on you know like lesbians and things like...like the public library I would go after school

I think in 9th grade, and I went there.... public library...... their library had a lot of books on like GLBT issues and religion, GLBT issues and color, and books about like, there is good section of books that are just about it and then there’s like the kids novels or the young adult novels like there are a lot of them about gay kids um, the Canadian writers.. I can check this book out and no one is going to know what it’s about but me because it’s got this normal title and you know like it’s not like gay sex 101, yes... you know it’s like I can read about these people who feel the same way I do and my parents aren’t going to know what I’m reading

I’d read, I knew a lot about like the GLBT community... I just knew the bits and pieces or whatever until like then I started reading stuff like Out and the Advocate like periodically... I read it and I’d be like oh so I’m not so crazy

A lot of stuff, you know, a lot different um GLBT stuff I’ve learned because I’ve read or you know personal experiences and other diversity issues I read a lot about and if you don’t read about you just don’t care then you have no idea what a lot of people are going through
I had some um like sexual education type books like I had one that when I was younger that um my mom gave me when I was in middle school just you know about puberty and growing up and I think it had like a short section about homosexuality.

Seven of the participants talked specifically about the friends that they could count on for support related to questioning their sexual identity. Several participants specifically stated that friends were more important than going to the counselor or social worker for support. More importantly, they describe needing emotional support versus informational support (Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002).

Just friends where I know it just doesn’t matter

When... when I questioned, I had my friends, so like I knew like if went... I know by telling my friends it really wouldn’t be a problem

But I wasn’t dying to.. to tell her[counselor] because my best friend was bisexual so if we needed to get it out

I think I like found more people to talk to in my peers than among like faculty and staff ..... I mean I’m very comfortable with like friends, and like obviously people who I know like have views that are.. like have Allied type views

I think it was more important for me to just.. to just have someone to go hey that guy is really hot. Like that was more important to me than for somebody telling me you know that this was what I felt

I mean I had friends who helped me a lot with like emotionally, to get.. to understand what was going on at the same time so I didn’t really need to talk to counselor for that... I had to have because if not... ewe.. who knows what I would be doing right now... I did have a base of friends... that was my support.. because I... it would have been so hard to go to a counselor and family was not an option at that time

I had built this support system around me, I had built other gay people around me and gay supportive people around me... I mean I really had a great comprehensive support network built up for myself before any kind of stressful situation.... I preferred for whatever reason my own personal friends and my family to some degree and the Internet for you know factual things
It depends on the person’s comfort level... with a counselor... I don’t know, it honestly depends on your level of comfort though... I was more comfortable either dealing with myself, or talking to someone who at least knew what I was going through, and I think that’s why I mainly... like I turned to [named friend]... I didn’t think like... there were a couple of friends that I knew wouldn’t judge me

My best friend was the best thing because I mean how... how odd is it that two best friends are gay, you know what I mean like without knowing that they were gay we just happened to be best... become best friends and they we just both happen to be gay

Another form of support was through teachers. A few of the participants felt they had a teacher who helped them with their sexual identity indirectly, and one of the participants actually told the teacher about their questioning or identity as gay or lesbian.

[math teacher] you think well maybe this person understands me as a person more on a deeper level... her sexuality was very ambiguous, like she didn’t to me look openly lesbian, you know and of course it wasn’t said, but I just you know what is it, a little vibe a little feeling, a little... you know... I remember my sophomore year, instead of the counselor because I didn’t go up to him until I think my junior year, but during my sophomore year she was very much an outlet to me... I would go in the morning and just talk to her before school and stuff... even though she didn’t know it at the time, she became very much an outlet for not fantasies but some kinda of me feeling better about myself... you know she really helped a lot in me feeling better about myself, and it was... it was... I guess she took the time to be interested in me and help me... I actually did need help with math, but while we were doing math we would talk about everything that was going on

I guess you know my AVID teacher was more of the person... like she I could say was my favorite teacher in high school... if my AVID teacher brought it up, you know had she brought it up then I might have you know talked to her or one of my other teachers...... I guess I was just to scared because I didn’t ... I guess I didn’t know what to... what I would have done had she rejected me even though now I don’t think she would have......She was more of a counselor but I mean she secondly also my teacher... had I not had her I wouldn’t be prepared for life after high school......My AVID teacher seems like a very just modern person, very open minded, very something, but I guess it just would have been nice...

One participant actually opened up to her teacher and found her supportive.

the teacher was basically like the pinnacle of talk... she was young and um I knew that she was okay with different things, like I met, like I knew her on a more personal level than the others ..... senior year I mostly talked to my biology
teacher who had also been like a homeroom teacher because she was in training to become the counselor that retired when I graduated, she is like 27 and just amazing and accepting of like everything in the world and really great to talk too..... I don’t know if it was because she was younger, because she like had no religious things, she wasn’t religious and she was a science teacher I guess and I felt like more science minded people would be less likely you know to be religious and then more likely to be accepting of alternative lifestyles... [you just felt more acceptance from her and more openness to accept for the person you are] yea, for everything I am, as opposed to three fourths of me

A few other participants found indirect support from the teacher who helped start, or advised, the schools gay straight alliance.

They managed to found a GSA in our school, and so like the um.. the woman who like was the teacher who was kinda like our advisor for that, I am sure if I wanted an adult to talk to I could have gone and talked to her, she was really open about everything like even though she was straight she was like very much an ally... she was very... like up in arms for gay rights and everything

[talking about teacher who helped start group] Well my friend who helped me out, that I was telling you about earlier, she and I um and another friend of ours wanted to start a group, and um we talked... um he was a social studies teacher, he was very nice guy, very you know open minded and that is what we really liked about him, but he he was all... I think he had... he had a gay brother... like he was very much involved and he really liked the idea

This same participant had been physically harassed in high school and found the counselor unhelpful to resolve the situation. This participant found support for handling the incident from the social studies teacher who helped start his GSA.

She [counselor] basically like asked me what I wanted to do, and I was just kinda like I don’t know, never been in this position and she wasn’t much help, so but um, I actually found teachers helped me much more than my counselors ...... I actually went to um the teacher, who helped us with the group, and he actually filed an incident report and the cops come and talked to these kids and all this stuff
4.6 Participants Recommendations for Counselors and Social Workers

The last theme to emerge was perceived ways counselors and social workers could help support GLBT students within the school community. These support activities included, (1) offering resources; (2) be more inclusive; (3) advocate for GLBT issues; (4) include GLBT culture in diversity activities; (5) facilitate and initiate gay straight alliance groups; (6) encourage GLBT themes and authors to be included in the classroom curriculum; (5) display Allied and other GLBT stickers and posters to know who is safe to approach; and (6) be familiar, educated, and knowledgeable about GLBT issues.

Several participants expressed a need for the counselors to have resources available and accessible.

I think if they were involved like I'm sure it would be beneficial because I mean like being counselors they probably know like where the resources are

I don't know I guess if someone had no other resources, and they were just lost in a sea of what do I do now... and someone came and said you are not alone, and here are some factual things, here are maybe some fiction, some movies, some books, and that seems to help a lot of people, and I don't know if that is an approach that social workers would take certainly not the one's I have worked with

I'm sure that they could um keep like literature in the guidance office too if they wanted to either resources or just little pamphlets about different things

They need to have more gay lit, but gay pamphlets .......By them not having any information or really anything set up like that I wasn't able to really dig deep fully into GLBT related things... related issues....There just wasn't enough information there and there wasn't anyone to talk to......

Yea more personal sources and not... there wasn't anywhere you could go and get it, and I guess now you can go to the GSA group
A few of the participants discussed that resource information was not accessible or visible for GLBT issues.

I mean they did have brochures but I don’t remember what… a lot of it was birth… we had a lot of pregnancies…. I looked at a few [brochures], like at one point when I was comfortable everything it was in my senior year I looked through just to see if there was GLBT thing in there… They had a lot of things but not that

Well I … they might have had it, but it definitely wasn’t like something everybody could see

They may have been more involved but just like more behind the scenes like I had… didn’t see, or they may have had some literature somewhere but I just like never really needed to look for it, so like I don’t know like what they have like I don’t know about their resources now

Several participants did not necessarily want a counselor for one-on-one support; they wanted a counselor that would advocate for their inclusion within the school system.

Not just necessarily offering their own services on a one-on-one basis because that again targets gay kids as sick

But counselors they never pushed for the issue [GLBT] you never heard about it a lot

Making sure you know that if people had issues to come talk to him

Kinda protecting us at school a little bit I think

Participants discussed the need for counselors and social workers to advocate and support the use of school presentations for GLBT inclusion.

If they would have some how made it known [to student body] that you know GLBT issues were okay to talk about… If they would have been a little bit more… like made it known that they were… that you could come in and talk to them about that

I mean there were times they would visit classes and they would talk about things like you know drinking alcohol or having sex or I mean they would always come in and talk about stuff like that, and they never brought up GLBT issues… and I think that would have been one way. If they would have brought up, could have
been like oh maybe I should go talk to them, because they sound like they know something about it

I just think that if the school environments even you know a little bit more knowledgeable then that would even help the counselors you know more so than just them being knowledgeable... because what I’m going to this counselor for is because of what students are doing

Make the school more aware about it make maybe a presentation to the entire school assembly or um do an activities day like and then it doesn’t even have to like... I mean you could incorporate other activities into it which I think would have been really helpful to our school, to just do some activities day, where you have just like broad issues, just brought up to these students

I don’t even know, like even if there was like awareness week about it, or even one day, just to make students a little bit more aware, that... that helps too, cause if the ... if the school environment is more open to it and more knowledgeable, then not only will the counselors be but everybody else and... it makes the living... the learning experience much easier, because like I said I had to get out of that class

They could have like a presentation... I guess they could have like a presentation or something, and like talk about you know like issues that you can talk to guidance counselors about because like um it wasn’t like um it wasn’t like exactly clear, I mean everyone knows that you can go to your guidance counselor to talk to them, but like people just might not think of it

Since there’s like the GSA... I’m sure they could do a presentation just like for the GSA... since they might not be able to do one for the whole school

I remember having assembly’s on all types of things about you know AIDS, or about drunk driving or about these things.... But I think what would have... and while we covered GLBT topics in I know social justice class or something like that, there was no actual you know presentation, not presentation, but I think it would have been nice if say a counselor or social worker could have made visits to class... talk about GLBT things... this class period you know you have a guest speaker and they talk about GLBT things and how GLBT youth, or how to be accepting and respectful... Shown a movie or you know said.. you know and after the presentation said you know we understand this is a sensitive issue and if anybody ever needs to... be aware that the social worker or counselor people at the school are trained or ready or open to talking with you...

I honestly feel that they needed to when they had us all together whatever, they... they needed to say one or two things about you know it was never touched upon
The way to remind them or to let them know that they were there for those issues is to do a presentation about GLBT or something like that and I don’t know they could probably talk to the teacher about it.

One participant believed that there are negative affects when including GLBT issues with other issues that were viewed as “problems” within the school.

If they had come over the assembly and said we have services for people who are being beaten and drug problems and are gay... like that would have sounded really bad....I mean in one way, you could look at it positively in that their not associating questioning your sexual orientation with things that society... does pretty much continuing problems teen pregnancy and things like that.

Another sub category that emerged, surrounding recommendations for support, was the inclusion of GLBT students in the diversity initiatives found within the school.

Constantly creating an atmosphere that said, proactively said gay students, and not just oh we accept everyone message, cause that’s neutrally means nothing, again that goes right over into our you know advertising filter with you know diversity day, having something proactively gay.

We did all kinds of diversity things like that and I think if we would have included GLBT issues in a similar vein, then I might have been a lot more open to go and talk to em [counselors and social workers] and just maybe help out with the project, the program or just to talk about anything.

When I was in high school, pretty much my whole high school was like all white upper class. So diversity to them was like a black person coming in... like that was diverse....You kept quiet.... I still wouldn’t have felt like GLBT issues would have been something that was diverse to them, it just something that wasn’t acceptable, you didn’t talk about it.

There’s not much diversity in my high school, like we’re talking like five African American kids, three Indian or Indian or middle Eastern descent, and like five um Asian, or uh you know Eastern Asian.

Several of the participants suggested that having a gay straight alliance would have been a support for them, and they perceived the counselor or social worker as being the one who possibly should facilitate and initiate the group.
I don’t know if the counselor would have done this... kinda like the social groups that Ohio State has where GLBT members can get together and just kind of hang out and talk... I don’t think if somebody would of. Actually I think somebody tried to suggest it, it never.... It just didn’t go over well... Just because it was just one of those things that you couldn’t talk about.. um, or even um like the common ground that they have here, where they have like um, like peer counselors or something where you can sit down with one of your peers and talk about your problems.

There were some schools that had a gay straight alliance... it’s just so great to like be there and have people who aren’t like oh you’re not going to hell for it

I think had teachers and principles and whatever had they just adopted like what other schools.. like other schools had.. gay and straight SAGA.. so I think had they just implemented things like that.. I think had the other counselor, the gay one, had he gotten with the three or four students who I’m thinking now are easy to have found, you know what I mean like you know you could have found four students to start this

It would have been great to have some sort of like group they could have had

Another participant felt that the social workers could have been effective, as a facilitator for their gay straight alliance group, but more training that is specialized would be needed.

Frankly, social workers might have been useful in helping us process our experiences um. we had a teacher who was our advisor but they would have had to have some specialized training

One participant felt his school would not have supported a gay straight alliance.

We didn’t have any student groups that were solely directed toward GLBT... They were...they were against it.. I from what I heard

Several of the participants who were involved in starting a gay straight alliance at their schools discussed the approach taken by the social workers to encourage more of a support group. What these students wanted was more of a social group.

School decided oh you wanted to start a gay group... some of my friends were really angry... ah yea social work, yea we have to start one for you, like they have one for you know kids with alcohol problems too... they said happy to start a
support group, but again, telling a group of kids who want to start a social group that we will be happy to start a support group, came off as we think your sick

A second participant discussed the obstacles faced at her school when trying to start a group. This participant does not mention any support from the counselors or social workers, only the teachers.

I tried to start some sort of gay straight alliance sort of thing... I couldn’t get one started... even like GLSEN or whatever with um like Cincinnati’s branches of it, and like my teachers, like I had a couple of teachers who were like if you want to do it you know we will back you up, but we can’t back you up to hard because you know they know we’re gay, we are just kind of sit here, just like you know floating in the sea

A third participant described his perception of starting a gay straight alliance at his school and talked about the lack of involvement by his counselor.

When my friend and I tried to start a group, um it was more of like a broaden group to just deal with different discriminating.. discriminating involvements... there was one [counselor] that was um I went to that she said she was going to help, but I mean, sort of did and sort of didn’t like she was really nice about it and said she would do stuff, but like when it came to like talking to the administration, I think she might have said something, but never really pushed hard enough for it, because nothing she did really helped at all........

This participant went on to describe the problems encountered with the administration.

They had the help of a teacher to advocate for them, but the counselors and social workers were not involved.

the administration wouldn’t let us do it at first because they thought it was just going to be dealt with GLBT and that’s it.....We went to the actual like principal and those people and we talked to them and they like every time they pushed us out, like they said no, like every issue we tried to talk to them about it was no and they were referred to as the gay group, because we were associated with the PFLAG in the community.....So this was all shocking to the school, the school’s not liking this whatsoever, but um, we were trying to do that, and like because we were associated with PFLAG they were telling us that we were trying to be a little PFLAG and all this stuff, yea... and they wouldn’t let us do anything, they kept banning us from being in student activities, they.. we were trying to do a lawsuit.. they tried they tried to.. keep us out of different activities that a lot of the
organizations in the school were in like a bigger... like a big activity fair or something... [they wouldn’t let you participate in those] well they tried not too, but my teach... we had a teacher who helped us get through that, we only had one teacher but... We were labeled the gay group even though we... our name was speak, which was Students Promoting Equality and Knowledge... which never dealt with, you know you don’t hear gay in that you don’t hear homosexual, you don’t hear anything about GLBT, and of course we’re like the gay group because we not only do the deal with all these other issues, but we deal with homosexuality and since that’s like something these students really aren’t used to.....We eventually got the group started

Two participants discussed how the school would not allow them to use the word “gay” in association with their gay straight alliance. The counselor or social worker was not there to advocate for the issue.

There was like one weird thing though, like we weren’t allowed to say gay straight alliance like on announcements or like on our posters, it just had to be the acronym... they were afraid that people might like be offended since it was a .. more of a conservative town... I thought it was kinda ridiculous... I thought like they were like the office wasn’t making the policy necessarily because they wanted too, maybe because probably they were just trying to protect the group I think... they didn’t want there to be a big uproar in the town and like have to take the group away just because of that

When we said we want to hang up these posters for our gay alliance our... for our gay group they said well okay here’s the thing, we in the administration you know the principal and everything have no problem with that we are totally supportive but we know that there are a lot of people in this school that wouldn’t be supportive... if you want to use the word gay on the posters if you want to use the word gay on the name of the group, we’re not going to tell you no, you have the right to do that... you won’t have to deal with the school board if you put sign up in the hallway and you put gay lesbian students, whatever... parents are going to call and it’s going to have to go to the school board... you might win... we know that you are seniors and you are graduating in six months and if you want to see this group do anything you might want to consider being a little more under the radar at least at first... some people were offended by that and said they were just trying you know blame the other people for their own prejudices some people said no, they’re really trying to help us because if we did come right out... and I think both were true

Of those who had a gay straight alliance, they gave descriptions of the perceived helpfulness of these groups as support.
Have the GSA... is really actually helping the school a lot.. it was actually established um during my senior year.. like the kids have somewhere to go... they can like make friends to support them if they don't have friends already... they have a place where they can talk about things about like being looked at funny or being ostracized

I know a lot of friends who actually have been helped by either official or artificial support groups and peer based and things like that

Looking back the kind of processing that we were able to do for ourselves was actually pretty pretty advanced for high schoolers....When it came to process our feelings about the issues, she (teacher advisor) left it so on a peer based and peer moderated environment was I think.. really again I am going to use empowerment for a lot of us... we did have a teacher advisor and she was certainly willing to help with being an adversary to help us stand up to the administration and things like that

A support group would have been nice like for kids who are gay or straight allies, or questioning or just interested.. I don’t know because I had people threaten to kill me, people threaten to beat me up, and of course my parents aren’t going to be like oh that’s terrible I’m sorry honey um um let me you know write a letter to the school board... says shit

They had people they could come and talk to who were either you know possibly like them or who were allies and would support them

One participant also discussed the need for a safe place group being started at his school.

I was always thinking like they never did say you know.. they could have set up a safe place, um that would be a thing, something I would see as beneficial

The next sub category, related to the recommendations for counselor or social worker support of GLBT students, was for the counselor or social worker to recommend to the teaching staff incorporating GLBT themes and authors in the classroom curriculum.

They definitely should have recommended to the teaching staff, especially the English department to have maybe one or two books that so maybe if someone did that did focus on gay themes .....I feel like the only way that... that it really will change in public opinion or school opinion is if you just start bringing it up... start etching away, start you know talking more and more about it and then by people become numb to it and then it is not a big deal

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Allowing and encouraging um gay literature to be taught in the classroom, acknowledging sexual identities of authors and things we read and historical figures, um not reading Shakespeare without acknowledging that he was bisexual, not discussing musicians in music history class without acknowledging that

There just isn’t a lot of stuff out there for adolescents and for high school.....because I feel you can learn a lot from other peoples experiences

The participant who had a supportive counselor at her Catholic high school discussed how GLBT themes were implemented in her classrooms.

My Catholic high school,... very liberal and open at the time... in all my religion classes, in all my social classes, we always talked about race and gender and GLBT issues

All of the participants talked about the specific benefits of displaying accepting stickers and posters in and around the counselor or social worker office.

Rainbow sticker in there.. that would have definitely helped... I still think part of it would have been me feeling like.. you know it’s not something you talk about, I was just raised like that, that you know that’s not acceptable

their bulletin board was right outside like the counselors office.. so it was kinda like um the counselors were sponsoring it almost which would lead me to believe that they’d be accepting about things like that

We finally got like art group there and said something about homosexuality [poster], and that was about the only thing that said something about it. And and I mean just anything like that just for like people to know that there’s support services there provided that these counselors and who’s ever there to help us actually understand about it, that they’re knowledgeable

If there wasn’t anything and they just had like their regular shelves of like you know application stuff and like stuff for testing and everything and like it wouldn’t have really been as evident.. but I mean just like those kinds of posters and things, like even though they’re cheesy sometimes I think can like actually reassure students in some cases

I would’ve liked to have seen you know going into a counselors office a safe place sticker or a rainbow of some sort or the pink triangle, just so that like.. cause I mean some of the students might not exactly see that, but I mean if you are a gay student, most gay people know that the rainbow, you know what it means... it’s
just it’s .. it’s a lot more comforting I think to see something like that to know that the person like will be understanding

If a lot of students in high school know about the... like Allied signs or whatever... safe place signs and I mean I never saw one of those in school until like... I think it was like a month before I left, and it was some.. um, I don’t even know who the lady was and why she was there she was in some little office off some.. off one of the hallways... it was weird because you would never see one of those stickers in my school, and I never thought they would put one up, but they did... [did she or the school display the sticker] ...I guess she did I don’t know if they did, I doubt they did

Anything like anything like any in the office just any sign of.. I don’t know just so that I when I walk in I know that they know something about gay people, like that their not going to be like your gay... what... kind of deal, I don’t want to walk in and have them... I don’t want to be uncomfortable

It would be nice to see you know some type of like something on the wall like a poster... I mean they always have posters about different things on the walls, and um

Here everybody has those nice little like I’m an Allied rainbow stickers, slap some of those on some high school doors

Basically putting up a sign and like them being knowledgeable about different issues and not even just homosexual issues

I think even tiny things I mean of course the rainbow thing would have been dead on like that would have... you know... okay so I know this teacher... this teacher you know the nurse the vice principal, I know these people are okay to talk to you

I know in public schools sometimes they have I mean they do have psychologist or they do have these counselors and they make it a point to put up signas about everybody’s included, or you know respect everybody or diversity is great

maybe put a poster up saying if you are dealing with some issues regarding like something about sexual identity, like something that I would see and be like oh yea I’m having trouble with this

I guess had teachers had that you know just somewhere in the room you know.. kind of like now I can walk down and if you had an HRC sticker on your door, most people wouldn’t know what that was as they walked by, but then I would kind of keep a mental note, oh he’s cool to talk too.. yea an Allied button, or an HRC sticker, that you know just seems like you know just a purple thing with two yellow an equal sign... you know most people wouldn’t .. wouldn’t think
anything of it... but for me it was my sign to know... oh she’s cool, had my counselor, well I don’t think I knew what that was at that time.

I think the stickers probably would be the best thing because most people... cause with the... with the SAGA thing, the straight and gay thing, that would kinda be out... like an out right saying it you know but the stickers have like I didn’t say, you didn’t say it you saw the sticker, it’s like me saying but I didn’t.... and you know with the SAGA thing, their out there, you might want to see them, but then everyone knows that that’s a the gay group, and if they see you there and you’re not ready to come out and they see you in the group their going to know you’re gay, but with the sticker it’s like you know nobody knows that she’s cool.... And you know so I think that would be the best thing because it’s very discreet, it’s very discreet...

I remember after we started the group, we put one up (poster) about... it was two um guys and it had some statistics about homosexuals, which I think should have been put up like more things like that so that more people are aware.

One participant mentioned her counselor displaying religious posters, and therefore she perceived that the counselor might not have been accepting of her sexual identity issues.

They could have put signs up or something, they could have had a sticker but I don’t think I would have believed it, maybe at first but not after a while, I mean there’s so... I don’t know.. my counselor she........ wasn’t very interested in that she kinda had her entire office plastered in posters about positive thinking, and um Jesus saving our lives and things... and.... She’s very non-biased when you wanted to talk to her, but she was mainly more like I want to schedule your classes... I don’t want to talk to you about this stuff.

She goes on to describe the importance of posters that promote inclusion.

Like when I see diversity, a lot of times, like we think of everything, but like at the same time, I know that I am homosexual and that most likely means that they are going to understand what I am saying and like it is going to be a more comfortable environment for me, so just to see those things, because I think a lot of times when you see things it just registers in your brain and makes the situation 10 times easier.

If you went to the nurse’s office and she had a you know we were the world, accept everybody, or a like PFLAG or an out.. like I know here at OSU lots of people have Allied stickers on their doors... something along those lines I think, I would have started the ball a lot sooner in life to coming out and being accepting of myself.

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One participant consistently had support from her counselor, a Catholic Brother. This relationship, approaching topics related to her identity as a lesbian, started because the counselor had a PFLAG sticker displayed in his office. Below are her comments about this situation.

He had a rainbow sticker and then on his bulletin board, and then he also had.. ask me about PFLAG scholarships underneath it.. so that’s how I knew like well if he’s got that on his board he’d would be pretty open to me talking to him about it

I mean nobody else other.. nobody else other than a gay teenager would have known what I was really, I don’t think, and so I think it was a clever, not a clever way, but a nice kinda.. yea subtle... a nice subtle way of saying... the first time I told him, I went in there for something else, and then I said, you know, I was wondering about that scholarship up there and it kinda opened the door.. I think even if he hadn’t had that, I think but.. I mean this was pretty on in my senior year, so I hadn’t... have much contact with him in my junior year, so I think even without the sticker I would have you know told him... he never came out and said you know this or that, but you know having that little message there.. I think he was a little taken back that somebody actually.. you know had asked him about it... but I think yet at the same time he was very like.. you know I asked him about it, he told me about it and he gave me the paperwork

Two of the participants had perceptions that their counselor may not have familiarity with gay, lesbian, bisexual, or a transgender person, maybe having never been around a GLBT person.

I don’t think any of them had any family like close family members that were, I mean they all knew a person or two but it wasn’t really close to

He probably, he might not have never known a gay person or knew how to deal with it

Seven out of the ten participants discussed the lack of education and knowledge of their counselor or social worker surrounding GLBT issues.

You had to go and say this isn’t right and they should have been more aware to that as counselors

I mean they had no clue.....They weren’t informed on them
But he seemed very uneducated about the issues very like no personal experience at all and um you know not sure of what to say maybe. I don't know ignorant ... I felt if I went to talk to him it wouldn't be helpful if I knew more about the issue than he did then what was he going to tell me. ... It would be awkward educating him, but if I educate him what's he going to do for me, you know, if I am in the one in the position of power there

I don't want to be rude, but she didn't seem very bright and so I kinda tried to avoid even talking to her generally speaking. only like I need to get into this class, don't talk to her about anything else, don't ask about college cause you don't seem like you're qualified to tell me anything ... I didn't even want to talk to her at all

She was a little older... she must have been late fifties, she's kinda .. I don't know. and I mean I was thinking about when she would have gone to college if she did, like I don't know if she would have the job if she hadn't gone, but like there probably was no even touching on that when she went to college especially depending upon where she went

Because they sound like they know something about it. when I go talk to someone about personal issues, I have to feel like that they are on the same level as me and that they are willing to sit there and listen like a friend

I just think they should be more knowledgeable about it so that when you go in there they know what you are talking about and they can understand... yea like on uh you know one to one basis, so, so basically that makes me more comfortable and I am not like running away

I felt like they just had no knowledge of it whatsoever like even if you asked them, they'd be like, what, what are you talking about, like it was never talked about like in my house at all even, like I can't remember anything about it, maybe one or two things, it was just like very hush hush

The following participant made three very relevant statements concerning the lack of knowledge and understanding his counselor had about the issues surround homosexuality.

More knowledgeable on the issue and on the topic especially because I mean not the whole population of the school is you know homosexual and deals with these issues

I also feel that the counselor... the counselor should be like I don't know; I think that they're .. I don't know if they are taught how to deal with these issues, because a lot of times, I know we had to give that... you know um presentation to
the teacher as well... which is... makes no sense to me, I mean they are in a position where they are supposed to be helping us, and we have to tell them how to, that, you know that makes no sense

She didn’t really I don’t think at the beginning, like I mean after me and my friends started talking to her more, she like... she she had like an open mind to it, but I don’t think she dealt with it often at our school

4.7 Comparison of Study Results with Scholarly Recommendations

An extensive review of the literature revealed several support recommendations for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students. These recommendations were broken down into six categories; see tables 2.1 – 2.6 and were compared with the emerging theories resulting from the experiences of the participants of this qualitative study.

The number one mentioned recommendation from the literature, at the micro level was to “accept the youth as they are” which was also directly indicated by participants who want a counselor or social worker who is accepting. Several scholars also discussed the importance of counselors not assuming every problem is about the adolescent’s sexuality. One participant was disappointed when counselors assumed the issue he brought to them was about his identity of being gay. Additionally, participants wanted the counselors and social workers to be trustworthy and non-judgmental. It emerged from the research that several participants had the fear of being judged. Only two scholars mentioned having a nonjudgmental attitude towards GLBT adolescents. In addition, one recommendation, knowledgeable about issues surrounding GLBT adolescents, emerged from this research, and it was often mentioned in the literature.
The literature revealed several other recommendations related to ways of being more inclusive that did not emerge from the participants during analysis. For instance, other frequently mentioned recommendation in the literature was that counselors should use neutral language, avoid heterosexual bias, and be comfortable discussing sexuality.

One scholar recommended that counselors and social workers avoid trying to change the person’s sexual orientation. Again, the study revealed two participants that were concerned about this issue when considering the counselor or social worker for support. Only one scholar discussed the importance of confidentiality when working with questioning or identifying adolescents, but several of the participants expressed concerns about the fear of their parents finding out and being ostracized by peers if their confidentiality was broken and sexual identity issues were disclosed. One scholar recommended encouraging adolescents to involve parents with issues of questioning their sexual identity, but this research indicated, from the fears expressed by the participants; this would not an effect support strategy.

In summary, the most often mentioned recommendations in the literature, along with having emerged from analysis, is that counselors need to be more inclusive and accepting, be knowledgeable about GLBT issues, and not assume every issue brought to them is about the adolescent’s sexuality. Additionally, participants expressed that counselors need to be communicating a nonjudgmental demeanor and emphasize confidentiality. One scholar felt that the counselors and social workers should encourage telling parents, which several participants did not agree with. Another scholar, as well as several participants, agreed that for counselors to go into counseling thinking they can change the adolescents sexual identity orientation would be a mistake and it was a
category that emerged; a fear of several of the participants. Figure 4.1 summarizes the findings at the micro level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature Review</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accept as they are - 4 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not assume every problem presented is GLBT related - 3 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable about issues surrounding GLBT adolescents - 3 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use neutral language - 3 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoid heterosexual bias - 3 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comfortable discussing sexuality - 3 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidentiality - 2 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-judgmental attitude - 2 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage adolescent to tell parents - 1 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoid changing adolescent’s sexual orientation - 1 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<th>Emerging Themes from Study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More accepting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-judgmental</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable about issues surrounding GLBT adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear that by approaching counselor or social worker parents will find out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid trying to change orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t assume every issue is GLBT related</td>
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Figure 4.1 Micro Level Intervention and Support Strategies
The number one recommendation mentioned in the literature, at the macro level, was for counselors and social workers to encourage the hiring of openly gay and lesbian teachers, counselors, and administrators, to serve as role models for those adolescents who question or identify as GLBT. Additionally, participants of this study felt that counselors and social workers needed to be proactive and advocate for hiring gay and lesbian staff. The literature points to advocating for anti-harassment policies that prevent homophobic slurs and violence within the school. This category indirectly emerged from the study. Participants wanted counselors and social workers to take a proactive stance creating an environment that was less heterosexist and homophobic. Several scholars mentioned more involvement in supporting public and institutional policy decisions, which could facilitate a more accepting environment. For instance, there were several suggestions advocating for sexual orientation non-discrimination policies to retain GLBT teachers, promote policies that protect against sexual harassment, and work to decrease heterosexism in the school system. Overall, the scholars and participants of this study agree that counselors and social workers need to be proactive and advocate for reducing heterosexism within the school system. Figure 4.2 summarizes the findings surrounding macro level interventions and support strategies.
Literature Review

- Hiring openly gay and lesbian teachers, counselors, and administrators as role models - 7 of 30 articles
- Advocating for anti-harassment policies - 5 of 30 articles
- Advocating for sexual orientation non-discrimination policy - 3 of 30 articles
- Working to decrease heterosexism in the schools - 1 of 30 articles
- Proactive and advocate to reduce heterosexism in the schools - 1 of 30 articles
- Become involved in supportive policies and institutional policy decisions - 2 of 30 articles

Emerging Themes from Study

- Proactive and advocate for hiring GLBT staff
- Create environment less heterosexist and homophobic
- Proactive and advocate to reduce heterosexism in the schools

Figure 4.2 Macro Level Intervention and Support Strategies

The two most often mentioned scholarly recommendations, found under resource options, were the importance of counselors and social workers knowing the resources that are available in the community and offering the appropriate referrals. These were not recommendations to emerge from categories from the participants in the study. The participants of this study were not comfortable with approaching the counselors, and therefore would not have ever been referred to community resources. Three other recommendations, often mentioned in the literature, included offering focus or support groups, include GLBT resources in presentations offered by the school such as sex-ed
and health related presentations, and advocating for school library books. Participants of this study overwhelmingly wanted to be included in school presentations. They felt like everything such as alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, and eating disorders were mentioned, but GLBT issues were ignored. Several participants expressed a need for books to be available in the counselor's office, but they did not directly express a desire for counselors to advocate for the inclusion of GLBT related books in the library. However, several participants, especially when first questioning their sexual identity, did turn to the public library to find resources related to GLBT culture. Another difference found between the literature and the emerging results of this study is the use of support groups. One participant felt that by offering a support group, in place of a social group for peer support, it was seen as viewing her and other questioning and identifying GLBT adolescents as pathological. Therefore, it might be more effective to offer focus and support groups only to parents and teachers to learn about GLBT adolescent support, but not for students. Additionally, a few scholars, and one participant of the study, discuss having a designated resource person in the school.

Three other resource activities were mentioned in the literature review. Surprisingly, having posters and stickers to display in counseling offices was not as often mentioned as other resource activities. However, the overwhelming majority of participants felt that displaying an Allied sticker or other GLBT related sticker was the most effective way for counselors and social workers to communicate acceptance and approachability. Several participants described the frustration in not knowing whom they could approach that would be accepting. As well, many of the participants wanted resources such as pamphlets and literature to be available in a location that would be
inconspicuous yet accessible. However, again, this recommendation was not often mentioned in the literature. Belonging to a gay straight alliance was the third recommendation that overwhelmingly was important to these participants as well as mentioned often by scholars. Several participants actually were instrumental in starting their gay straight alliances. These participants felt that the gay straight alliance was a form of inclusion in the school and a way to communicate, relate, and have peer support.

Participants and scholars both agree on the importance of counselors displaying GLBT posters and stickers, have accessible books, pamphlets, and other literature in the counseling office, include GLBT topics in school presentations, and support gay straight alliances. Additionally, scholars mention that knowing the resources in the community, offering appropriate referrals, and facilitating focus and support groups, were important. While these are important, these were not recommendations that emerged from the participants of this study. Figure 4.3 summarizes the findings regarding needed resources.
Literature Review

Know resources available in community - 13 of 30 articles
Offer appropriate referrals - 11 of 30 articles
Offer focus and support groups - 8 of 30 articles
Include GLBT information in presentations - 8 of 30 articles
Advocate for school library books - 8 of 30 articles
Support and implement gay straight alliances - 7 of 30 articles
Stickers and posters displayed in office - 5 of 30 articles
Offer gay literature and pamphlets - 5 of 30 articles
Offer resources in accessible place not attracting attention - 3 of 30 articles
Designate a resource person in school - 3 of 30 articles
Have books available in office - 1 of 30 articles

Emerging Themes from Study

GLBT topics included in school presentations
GLBT related books, pamphlets, and literature in counseling office
Not offer support groups for students but maybe offer to parents and staff
Display Allied stickers and other stickers
Pamphlets and literature accessible place not attracting attention
Support and implement gay straight alliances
Designate GLBT resource person in school

Figure 4.3 Coordinating Resources

In the grouping of professional skills, the knowledge and education about GLBT issues was the most often mentioned recommendation by scholars. It was also found to
be of importance to the participants of this study. Scholars and participants agree that counselors and social workers need to make sure that they are familiar, educated, and knowledgeable about homosexuality, and as a category that emerged from the study, counselors were not educated about the issues at all.

Advocating for GLBT issues was another recommendation often mentioned by scholars and it emerged from this study. Scholars recommend that counselors and social workers need to explore personal feelings and attitudes about homosexuality, and to be well informed on sexual identity development of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender adolescents. These recommendations, as well as the knowledge and education level, was found to be important by both scholars and participants of this study, and they are important skill sets needed by the counselor or social worker who have the professional responsibility to the well-being of these adolescents. Figure 4.4 summarizes these findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature Review</th>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge and education on GLBT issues - 8 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocacy for GLBT issues - 2 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explore personal feelings about homosexuality - 5 of 30 articles</td>
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<td>Informed on identity development of GLBT adolescents - 4 of 30 articles</td>
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<th>Emerging Themes from Study</th>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge and education on GLBT issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocating for GLBT issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informed on identity development of GLBT adolescents</td>
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Figure 4.4 Professional Skills of the Counselor and Social Worker

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A limited number of recommendations for diversity initiatives were mentioned in only seven out of the thirty scholarly articles. This area was a category found to be important for participants of the study. Participants wanted to see diversity activities, related to GLBT culture, incorporated with other diversity activities within their school. The few recommendations by scholars for diversity inclusion were (1) intolerance for not valuing diversity, (2) social workers become role models of respect and acceptance of diversity, (3) celebrate diversity via assemblies and speakers, (4) include sexual diversity issues in human relations sessions for staff and students, (5) encouraging and acquiring educational resources promoting acceptance such as diversity posters, (6) and including diversity awareness and multicultural initiatives information on GLBT. Two of the scholars recommended that social workers become role models of respect and acceptance for diversity. It would seem, based on the lack of research in this area that more attention needs to be directed at advocating for inclusion of GLBT diversity within schools. Especially since the category was found to be important by participants in this study. Figure 4.5 summarizes the findings related to diversity initiatives.
Figure 4.5 Diversity Initiatives

The last grouping was those recommendations for counselors and social workers working with teachers, administrators, and staff. The primary recommendation by scholars was for counselors to advocate for training and education of the school personnel. While this was not a category to emerge from the study, it is a very important area needing to be addressed. It could be instrumental in promoting an environment that is less heterosexist and homophobic, a category that did emerge from the study. The second most often mentioned recommendation from scholars includes working with
teachers for inclusion of GLBT issues in the lesson plans and encouraging the use of historical GLBT figures in the curriculum. This area emerged as a category from the study; therefore, it is seen as important to both scholars and participants. Several of the participants felt that discussing aspects of an author’s life was ignored if he or she were gay or lesbian. Two other areas that did not emerge as categories in the study, but were often mentioned by scholars were having faculty and staff workshops and encouraging in-service day to address homophobia and the needs of GLBT students. These are considered to go along with training and education of school personnel and therefore are seen as important. Figure 4.6 summarizes the findings.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Literature Review</th>
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<tr>
<td>Advocate for training and education of the school personnel - 7 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage in-service day to address both homophobic and needs of GLBT students - 4 of 30 articles</td>
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<td>Faculty and staff workshops - 3 of 30 articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train peer educators/counselors for sensitively to GLBT issues - 2 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training administrators, teachers, and support staff on effective methods for interrupting homophobic harassment - 1 of 30 articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with teachers for inclusion of GLBT issues in lesson plans - 4 of 30 articles</td>
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<td>Encourage the use of historical GLBT figures into curriculum - 2 of 30 articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>GLBT issues included in lesson plan</td>
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<td>Encourage the use of historical GLBT figures in curriculum</td>
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Figure 4.6 Strategies for Working with Teachers, Administrators, and Staff
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Recommendations for Further Research

There were many identified barriers, which affect receiving support from the high school counselor or social workers. Many of these barriers center on inclusion within the school system. The lack of inclusion seems to resonate from prejudicial beliefs and understandings about homosexuality. It has been shown in the literature that familiarity, knowledge, and education break down the barriers to acceptance. Counselors and social workers have been educated in understanding that differences exist in people, and they abide by values respecting all individuals; advocating for inclusion. Education and knowledge, related to GLBT adolescent development, is vital for effective support. There needs to be research to understand the best way to educate professionals who work with these adolescents, and what is being done and what needs to be done to reach professionals responsible for support of these adolescents. Should it be college level training, in-service or workshops and should administrators be encouraged to make this training mandatory? There also needs to be more research on effective strategies that school counselors and social workers can implement, to educate staff.

Another way to break down the barriers of prejudice would be for counselors and social workers to embrace multicultural diversity, and to include GLBT adolescents in
this diversity within the school system. This should be an important initiative for
counselors and social workers to advocate throughout the school system. Overall, this
study found that while in high school these participants wanted to be included in diversity
initiatives. They wanted to be accepted and looked at as more than just gay, lesbian,
bisexual, or transgender. There needs to be more research to understand the processes
that can make this a reality.

Another discovery found in this research is that only one of the ten participants
had a social worker in their high school. It therefore would seem that by having a social
worker in the school it could have a positive effect on GLBT adolescent support. This
research found that participants want counselors and social workers to advocate for their
inclusion in many activities found within the school where they have expressed exclusion.
There needs to be more research on schools with social workers, and those schools with
only counselors, and what differences, if any, their presence has on inclusion of GLBT
adolescents.

One of the more important findings in this research, not directly related to
counselor and social worker support, was the fact that adolescents, who are questioning
or identifying as GLBT, turn to the Internet for peer-to-peer support, especially when
they first start questioning their sexual identity. These participants described a situation
where they assessed their environments and felt that their identity had to be kept a secret.
Therefore, they used the Internet as an alternative for in-school peer-to-peer support.
There needs to be more research on Internet use by questioning and self-identifying
GLBT adolescents to understand this form of support on the healthy development of
social competence. Information about the use of the Internet by questioning adolescents
was not found in current literature. Additionally, it has been established in the research, discussing the developmental models of homosexual identity development, that adolescents ignore their emerging feelings when first questioning their identity. This was identified as the first stage and labeled Identity Confusion. What effect does the use of the Internet have on this stage of development? Some of these adolescents are turning to the Internet at early ages. For instance, it was found that one of the participants of this study was in 7th grade when he started using the Internet for peer-to-peer support. What effect does conversing with possibly older individuals have on social competency development? If Internet use is found to be a maladaptive way of coping with social isolation, does it then give more reason for direct peer-to-peer support to be emphasized throughout the school? Additionally, one scholar recommended that counselors and social workers could use the Internet for support groups, but there has been no other literature addressing this recommendation to facilitate support. Moreover, as long as the school environment accepts institutionalized homophobia it is possible that peer-to-peer support, found through the Internet, will be seen as a valid way of coping for the lack of direct peer-to-peer support. Again, research is needed to understand this emerging discovery better.

Finally, this research was conducted with participants that were 18 – 21. There needs to be more research directly with high school students about the support they receive from the counselor or social worker.
5.2 Implications for Practice

There are several implications for practice based on the findings of this research. Several differences are found at the micro level, where counselor and social workers interact directly with adolescents who are questioning or identifying as GLBT. The first implication is the importance of having a nonjudgmental demeanor. While there has not been a lot of attention in the literature, directed at the importance of exhibiting a nonjudgmental approach, the results of this research determined its importance. A second implication for practice, the literature points to counselors and social workers encouraging adolescents to involve their parents with issues related to questioning or identifying as GLBT. This research found that participants were afraid of their parents finding out and they would avoid that possibility at all cost. Another area of concern for these participants, and an implication for practice, was making sure that what they told their counselor or social worker was kept confidential. If the counselor or social workers can emphasize their belief in keeping discussions confidential, it will eliminate this barrier to support.

One of the biggest implications for practice was that participants were looking for an indicator that the counselor or social worker was approachable about GLBT issues. The participants in this research discussed the use of stickers and posters to identify accepting individuals. This was found in the literature as well, but it was surprisingly not mentioned as often as other recommendations. This researcher believes it should be elevated as a very important facilitator to support.
Several of the participants of this research were involved in starting gay straight alliances within their schools. This type of resource was a recommendation that was found in both the literature and emerging from this research. It is considered a resource that supports GLBT adolescent development and should be highly promoted and facilitated by school counselors, social workers, and administrators.

As we learn in various therapeutic intervention approaches, rigid rules cause negative feedback loops which fuel abnormal reactions and hinder change. There is a need for more direct interventions that break down rigid rules related to homophobic and heterosexist attitudes found in the schools. This can be accomplished with the use of collaboration and advocacy, both activities supported by the American School Counseling Association and the National Association of Social Workers. When working with questioning or GLBT self-identified adolescents, these professionals need to take the responsibility of being change agents. The participants of this study wanted to be included in diversity activities within their school environments. The focus on including the GLBT culture in diversity activities will go a long way to break down the institutional homophobia that seems to be affecting all areas of support for these adolescents. It would seem that inclusion in diversity activities could be the most effective facilitator for supporting a normal identity development for these adolescents, who at this time, seem to have very little support found in the school system. Therefore, it should be considered to hold much importance for practice.

The last implication for practice, emerging from this study, were the beliefs by all but one of the participants, that their counselor or social worker was not educated or familiar with issues related to homosexuality. As well, the literature has found education

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and knowledge of GLBT issues to be of importance for counselors and social workers. In concluding this study, it should be evident, based on the overall findings of this study, that school counselor and social worker homosexual development knowledge and education, for better understanding of questioning and GLBT identified adolescents, are the most important components to facilitate being a change agent advocating and collaborating for inclusion of these adolescents. If educators, and we as a society, believe that all children should be afforded academic and social competency success, we must become educated on the importance of recognizing student differences found within our schools. This includes those adolescents who question or identify as GLBT.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Respondent Number ___________

Study of Experiences with High School Counselors and Social Workers

Thinking about your time in high school when you first started questioning your sexual identity,

(1) What were your perceptions, regarding GLBT issues, of the helpfulness of the high school counselor or social worker?

(2) (A) If you had contact with the high school counselor or social worker, specifically about GLBT issues, please tell me what that experience was like for you.
(B) If you did not have any contact with the high school counselor or social worker, specifically about GLBT issues, please tell me about what that was like for you.

(3) (A) What was important to you in being able to approach your high school counselor or social worker for support services related to GLBT issues?
(B) Was there anything about the high school counselor or social worker that made a difference in using his or her support services?

(4) Thinking specifically about your GLBT related needs as a high school student, what was it that either hindered or helped you in receiving what you needed from the high school counselor or social worker?

(5) Whether or not you received support services from the high school counselor or social worker, what kinds of support activities would you have felt could have further helped you with the issues specifically related to your personal struggles with your sexual identity?
APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Respondent number

Study: Experiences with High School Counselors and Social Workers

Dear Participant:

This information will be kept confidential and safe guarded for your protection.

Thank you for your willingness to help with this study.

Name

Student Rank (Status) at The Ohio State University

E-Mail Address

Gender

Sexual Preference

Age

Date of graduation from High school

Type of High School (Circle one)

A) Rural
B) Suburban
C) Urban

Please provide an (X) if your High School had any of the following:

A) Social Workers
B) Psychologist
C) Counselors
No, please destroy my questionnaire, audiotape and transcription at the end of the study. Yes, I would like you to return my questionnaire, audiotape, and transcription to the address below. (The materials will be mailed at the end of May or the first part of June).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Callahan, C. (2000). Schools that have not protected and worked with gay and lesbian students have been sanctioned by the courts. *Education, 121*(2), 313-326.


