Myths and Misconceptions About LGBTQ Youth:

School Counselors' Role in Advocacy

Roberto L. Abreu
University of Kentucky

Adriana G. McEachern and Maureen C. Kenny
Florida International University

Abstract

Although schools are thought to be safe environments for *all* students, sexual minority and gender expansive (i.e., LGBTQ) students often feel unsafe and unwelcome as a result of misconceptions about their identity. This paper explores eight commonly held myths and misconceptions about LGBTQ youth. The role of professional school counselors (PSCs) in debunking these myths and advocating for these students will be discussed. Implications for practice and future research will be addressed.

Keywords: LGBTQ students, myths, safe schools, counselors' role

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Public and social media have created an increased awareness of sexual minority and gender expansive youth, their needs, and the challenges they face in schools and communities. Specifically in school settings, LGBTQ youth are disproportionally bullied by peers and school staff (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). In a national school climate survey by Kosciw and colleagues (2016), 98.1% of LGBTQ students reported they frequently heard the word "gay" used in a derogatory manner, 85.2% reported verbal harassment (such as threats of violence, name calling), 48.6% reported different forms of cyberbullying (via text messaging or social media), and 34.7% reported being physically harassed (pushed or shoved) in the past year. Such hostility has been correlated to lower GPAs, fewer plans to pursue post-secondary education, higher rates of depression, and lower self-esteem among LGBTQ students when compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Kosciw et al., 2016). Similarly, in a recently released national study of sexual minority high school students, LGB high school students reported higher levels of physical and sexual violence and bullying than their heterosexual counterparts, including: (a) forced to have sex (18% vs. 5%), (b) experienced sexual dating violence (23% vs. 9%) and physical dating violence (18% vs. 8%), and (c) experienced bullying at school (34% vs. 19%) and online (28% vs. 14%; Kann et al., 2016). More than 40% of these students reported considering suicide and approximately 30% reported attempting suicide in the last year. Furthermore, 60% of participants indicated they stopped engaging in home and school

activities as a result of feeling sad or hopeless and more than 10% reported having missed school because they did not feel safe (Kann et al., 2016).

Professional school counselors (PSCs) are at the forefront to assist these students and educate teachers, school personnel, parents, and all students about youth who identify as LGBTQ. Along with providing education and individual and group interventions, PSCs must also become active advocates for this population. This paper will address misconceptions that persist in society and schools about LGBTQ youth. These misconceptions are based on: (a) over 40 years of documented anti-LGBTQ propaganda aimed at demoralizing and dehumanizing LGBTQ people with no scientific evidence (Schlatter & Steinback, 2011) and, (b) current national issues (e.g., bathroom bills) that aim to restrict access to services to LGBTQ people, including youth in school settings. In addition, this paper will discuss ways PSCs can confront and quell myths and misconceptions, advocate, and serve LGBTQ students in order to minimize harm and increase awareness.

Although all school personnel are responsible for the safety of LGBTQ students, school counselors might be more effectively positioned to advocate for these students. Several studies have found that LGBTQ students repeatedly identify school counselors as the one administrator they feel the most comfortable talking to about their LGBTQ identity (Hall, McDougal, & Kressica, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2016). For example, in the study by Kosciw and colleagues (2016), over half of LGBTQ students (51.7%) reported feeling comfortable talking to school counselors, this was significantly higher than for principals (25.1%), assistant principals (24.3%), and security officers (24.2%). As we can see, students are identifying school counselors as potential resources for support

and advocacy. In addition, school counselors' must follow ethical codes that specifically mandate that these professionals advocate for students at individual, group, institutional, and societal levels and are called to eradicate barriers that hinder the development and growth of students (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2016).

Definitions/Prevalence

It is important for PSCs to know and use correct and current terminology as it demonstrates sensitivity to diversity and an understanding of sexual minority and gender expansive students. The terms used in this paper are defined below (see Appendix A for a thorough review). Sex (male or female) is assigned at birth based on physical attributes and other biological markers. In contrast, gender refers to the social construction of masculinity and femininity in a specific culture in time. It involves gender roles (the expectations imposed on someone based on their gender), gender attribution (how others perceive someone's gender), and gender identity (how someone defines their own gender). Cisgender refers to a person whose gender is congruent with the sex assigned at birth. Transgender refers to people whose gender identity is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual identity or behavior, and a transgender person may identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, or any other sexual identity. Gender expansive is often used to describe a more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system (e.g., Abreu, Mosley, & Black, 2014; Killermann, 2014; Orr et al., 2015). Among others, gender

expansive might include identities such as gender fluid, gender neutral, and gender queer (Baum et al., 2013).

Sexual orientation or sexual identity are terms used to describe how one thinks of oneself with respect to whom one is or is not emotionally, socially, psychologically, and/or physically attracted (Abreu et al., 2014). For some it is innate and never changing, whereas for others it is fluid across time and contexts. Although there is no specific age for individuals to identify as LGBTQ, a study by the Pew Research Center found that LGB individuals reported that 12 is the median age when they first felt their identity was something other than heterosexual (Taylor, 2013). In addition, another recent study by the Pew Research Center found that among teens between the ages of 13 and 17, 3% identified as transgender, 2% as LGB, and 3% were unsure of their sexual identity (Lenhart, Smith, & Anderson, 2015). The remainder of this paper is devoted to identifying frequent myths regarding sexual minority and gender expansive youth and providing ways in which PSC's can help dispel these false assumptions.

LGBTQ Identity and Well-being

Myth #1: Being LGBT is just a phase and a choice. Perhaps one of the most common misconceptions about LGBTQ people is that "*it is just a phase*". This misconception is especially prescribed to adolescents, as they are labeled as "misguided" and "confused" for feeling and/or experiencing a sexual attraction to someone of the same-sex, both sexes, or for identifying with a gender different than the one assigned to them at birth (e.g., Ziomek-Diagle, Black, & Kocet, 2007). However, over 30 years of research has come to the same conclusion: being an LGBTQ individual is an identity and not a choice. Burton and Lothwell (2012) explain that similar to their

heterosexual and cisgender counterparts, LGBTQ adolescents become aware of their sexuality and gender and experience conflicts involving the physical self while attempting to maintain a healthy connection with their peers, parents, and other significant figures and role models. LGBTQ adolescents face unique developmental challenges related to coping with environments that often pathologize their sexual and/or gender identities. LGBTQ youth experience daily environmental stresses resulting from homophobic, heterosexist, and transphobic messages they hear in schools and their communities (e.g., Shilo & Mor, 2014). These adolescents learn very quickly that who they are and what they feel is not often accepted by others, and they may conceal these feelings and identities for fear of rejection and abuse (Ziomek-Diagle et al., 2007).

Further, many students and school personnel believe the myth that an individual chooses to be LGBTQ (Marszalek & Logan, 2014). PSCs can play critical roles in dispelling this myth by helping parents, school personnel, and other students understand that a youth's sexual and gender identity is part of who they are. Recognizing that the youth is still the same person before they came out (i.e., publicly shared their sexual and/or gender identity) may help others gain a greater level of acceptance. Chan (2006) goes a step further and argues that just as any other identity, a child and adolescent's sexual identity is to be protected under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Discouraging a child or adolescent from questioning and challenging heterosexual and cisgender norms, is to deny them a healthy and typical development (Chan, 2006).

Myth #2: LGBTQ students are easy to identify. Another commonly held belief is that LGBTQ individuals are easily identifiable among their peers. Often times "markers" of sexual and gender identity are conflated with gender performance (i.e., how others express their perception of their gender). For example, men who display behaviors that society ascribes to women are labeled as gay; whereas women who display behaviors typically ascribed to men are labeled lesbians. As indicated earlier, sexual identity refers to how one thinks of one self in terms of whom one is or is not emotionally, socially, psychologically, and/or physically, and is not determined by someone's gender expression. Although gender performance and sexual and gender identity could meet, they are different concepts. One's gender performance is not necessarily indicative of the person's sexual and/or gender identity (Killermann, 2014; Parrott, 2009).

PSCs and other school professionals should never assume any student's sexual or gender identity and consider the student may not have come out due to fear of being harassed, bullied, or discriminated against (Marszalek & Logan, 2014). Although, sexual minority and gender expansive youth are beginning to come out at earlier ages than in previous years (Ryan, 2009), many of these students report verbal and physical assault because of their sexual identity (Kosciw et al., 2016). This hostile reaction from their peers puts these youth at a higher risk for depression and makes them four times more likely to commit suicide than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (CDC, 2011). PSCs are in unique positions in schools to act as advocates and to provide preventative interventions, school-wide resources, and the support needed to keep *all* students safe.

Myth #3: Why can't they just keep their feelings to themselves? Some believe that schools would be better environments if LGBTQ youth could just keep their sexual and gender identity silent (Marszalek & Logan, 2014). This underlying assumption fails to validate the existence and experiences of sexual minority and gender expansive youth and creates non-inclusive school environments. Contrary to this myth, LGBTQ inclusive school environments are not only beneficial for LGBTQ students but for the overall school climate (e.g., Legate & Ryan, 2014; Legate, Ryan, & Weinstein, 2012; Matthews & Salazar, 2012; Ryan, Legate, & Weinstein, 2015; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011). Research suggests that when LGBTQ individuals are exposed to positive environments and experience supportive reactions from those around them, their overall short- and long-term well-being is enhanced (e.g., Legate & Ryan, 2014; Legate et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2015).

The first coming out experience is crucial in the life of the LGBTQ person, and PSCs are able to facilitate this experience. As described above, compared to other school personnel, LGBTQ students have reported feeling comfortable speaking to school counselors about their sexual and gender identity (Hall et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2016). As social advocates, PSCs can work collaboratively with LGBTQ students to support and empower them through the coming out process as well as to advocate for systemic change (Matthews & Salazar, 2012). For PSCs, this would include helping change policies and working with teachers and administrators to address the needs of LGBTQ students (Matthews & Salazar, 2012). In addition, PSCs are encouraged to establish Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs in their schools. GSAs, or student run organizations typically found in middle and/or high schools, provide a safe place for

students to meet, support one another, discuss sexual and gender identity, and work toward advocacy. To start one at your school, see https://gsanetwork.org/resources/building-your-gsa/what-gsa. The presence of GSAs in schools (regardless of membership) has been associated with increases in student well-being and college level attainment for all students, not just LGBTQ students (Toomey & Russell, 2013; Toomey, et al., 2011). GSAs have also helped to decrease homophobic, heterosexist and transphobic language and victimization toward LGBTQ students (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). GSAs benefit LGBTQ students, their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts, and the overall school climate as less victimization requires less disciplinary actions from school personnel. Furthermore, GSAs and other LGBTQ-inclusive programs in schools offer evidence of a school's commitment to LGBTQ students, creating a source of perceived support for these students, their allies, and families (e.g., Estrada, Singh, & Harper, 2017). When LGBTQ students are able to openly and safely express their identity, *all* students are part of safe school environments that promote access to education, higher academic achievement, and well-being.

Safety, Needs, and Education of LGBTQ Students

Myth #4: Parents must be informed of their child's sexual and gender identity. Research has documented the benefits of parent-school collaboration. For example, research suggests that linking parents and families with schools and creating partnerships can improve struggling students' academic performance as well as improve their personal and social successes (Griffin & Steen, 2010). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012) stresses the importance

of parent-centered and family-centered collaboration and asserts that the engagement of parents and families influences the well-being of students. Parent and family centered involvement is critical when working with LGBTQ students. However, PSCs should use caution about discussing any student's sexual or gender identity with parents without first speaking with the student about it. If the student has not disclosed, revealing their sexual and/or gender identity to parents might have detrimental effects for the youth if the parents are rejecting of the child's disclosure.

Many LGBTQ students believe they have less overall parental support than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (Stettler & Katz, 2017; Frank, 2016). LGBTQ students who have been victims of bullying also report a lack of parental support (António & Moleiro, 2015; Stettler & Katz, 2017; Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011). Taking these findings a step further, over 20 years of research on parental acceptance has concluded that negative parental responses and lack of support lead to poor psychological well-being among LGBTQ youth, such as stress, anxiety, suicide and suicidal ideation, low self-esteem (D'Amico, Julien, Tremblay, & Chartrand, 2015; Hackimer & Proctor, 2015; Institute of Medicine [IM], 2011; Needham & Austin, 2010), increased risky health behaviors, such as substance abuse and risky sexual behaviors (e.g., Bouris et al., 2010; D'Amico & Julien, 2012; IM, 2011; Padilla, Crisp, & Rew, 2010), and verbal and physical abuse from the parent (e.g., Bouris et al., 2010; D'Augelli, Grossman, Starks, & Sinclair, 2010; IM, 2011; Willoughby, Doty, & Malik, 2010). In addition, according to the Williams Institute, approximately 68% of LGBTQ youths' homelessness is the result of parental rejection, with 54% of these youth experiencing abuse (including physical and emotional), by their parents (Durso & Gates,

2012). In contrast, LGBTQ youth whose parents are accepting report higher psychological well-being, less risky health behaviors, and less verbal and physical abuse from parents (e.g., Bouris et al., 2010; Heck et al., 2011; Stettler & Katz, 2017).

Parental involvement is key to the well-being of students, but it also poses a risk when students' sexual and/or gender identity is disclosed to parents who are not accepting, thus, potentially creating an unsafe environment at home (e.g., Bouris et al., 2010). Some researchers and legal scholars take particular issue with school personnel disclosing students' sexual and/or gender identity to parents without student consent and without considering the student's well-being and potential harmful consequences (e.g., Ettinghoff, 2014; Whittaker, 2009). Whittaker (2009) has argued that requiring counselors to contact parents in order for their child to join GSA in school is a violation of the "freedom to associate" provision in the First Amendment. In addition, Ettinghoff (2014) explains that parental notification of their child's sexual and/or gender identity interferes with students' decision to come out on their own terms and forces a family to address an intensely personal and potentially controversial issue without considering the willingness or readiness of the individuals in that family to discuss the matter at the time of the disclosure.

However, there may be instances when PSCs will need to break confidentiality, and as a last resort, may need to disclose the student's gender and/or sexual orientation to parents. For example, if the student presents with suicidal or homicidal ideations and may be a threat to self and others, PSCs are ethically and legally bound to inform the parents (Section A.2.e, ASCA's Ethical Standards for School Counselors, 2016), and the issue of the student's sexual and/or gender identity may come up if it is

the prevailing cause. Since suicide is significantly higher among these youth, PSCs need to be diligent at assessment (Kann et al., 2016). Students must be informed confidentiality will be breached prior to the disclosure to parents, and PSCs should discuss with students their feelings regarding the disclosure of their gender and/or sexual identity (Section A.2.f and A.2.g, ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors, 2016). It is always preferable to use the "most appropriate and least intrusive breach" and encourage them to self-disclose the information to parents, with counselor support (Section A.2.g, ASCA Ethical Standards, 2016, p. 2). When dealing with value-laden issues, PSCs must remember ASCA's (2016) ethical standard A.2.f., "Recognize their primary obligation for confidentiality is to the students but balance that obligation with an understanding of parents'/guardians' legal and inherent rights to be the guiding voice in their children's lives" (p. 2). PSCs are encouraged to work closely with LGBTQ students to help and support them should they choose to disclose their sexual and/or gender identity to their families and also to prepare them for possible negative and unsupportive parental responses (Collier, Bos, & Sandfort, 2015). Further, PSCs role includes working with all parents to create awareness about the importance of parental acceptance toward LGBTQ children. Appendix B provides a list of online resources that could be beneficial for school counselors to help them handle situations where they might need to serve as a source of support for LGBTQ students and their families while maintaining their legal and ethical duty.

Myth #5: Gender-neutral facilities are a threat to safety and order. With same-sex marriage now a federal law, many LGBTQ advocates have shifted resources to address issues affecting transgender and gender expansive individuals (McGuire,

2014). The focal point of this advocacy has mostly involved the right for transgender individuals to be able to use the restroom of the gender they identify with rather than the one that was assigned to them at birth. However, in spite of advocacy efforts, several states have attempted to pass laws that hinder the rights of transgender individuals. The proponents of these laws tell the public that their views are grounded on "public safety and privacy measures" (Brodey & Lurie, 2015, p. 2), but no scientific data supports the claim that trans-inclusive or gender-inclusive facilities pose a threat or are unsafe to any particular individual (Brinker & Maza, 2014). By mid-2015 states such as Florida, Kentucky, and Texas had introduced bills to criminalize (ranging from fines of $1,000 to felony charges of a minimum of 180 days in prison) the actions of any person who did not use the bathroom and other gender-segregated facilities (e.g., lockers) corresponding with their birth sex (Brodey & Lurie, 2015).

Many of these laws have made their way into school systems, potentially putting at risk the well-being of transgender and gender expansive students (e.g., Lonetree, 2015). For example, during February 2016, South Dakota became the first state to pass a bill banning transgender students from using school restrooms congruent with their gender identity. The proponents of this bill claimed that it is "inappropriate" for "individuals of different sex" to share the same restroom (Holden, 2016, p. 1). Although the governor of South Dakota eventually vetoed this bill, it still sent a message about the lack of support for transgender youth. Recently, other states, such as Georgia and North Carolina have filed and passed similar bills (Holbrook, 2016). In 2015, Media Matters for America contacted 17 school districts in 12 states (covering over 600,000 students) to inquire about cases of harassment or inappropriate behavior after passing

transgender inclusive policies. The results demonstrated that there were no incidents of harassment or inappropriate behavior in schools that allowed transgender students' access to the restroom congruent with their gender identity (Percelay, 2015). These results debunk the belief that having gender inclusive facilities is a threat to discipline and order in schools.

Myth #6: School policies and laws protect all students. Research on inclusive school laws and policies on sexual minority and gender expansive youth has largely focused on the effectiveness of anti-bullying laws and policies. According to a GLSEN report on anti-bullying policies in the United States' school districts (N = 13,181), 70% of districts had anti-bullying policies, with a range of 23% to 100% of districts in each state having anti-bullying laws (Kull, Kosciw, & Greytak, 2015). However, only 20% of school districts had LGB-inclusive anti-bullying policies and 10% of districts had LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying policies (Kull et al., 2015). In spite of existing school district anti-bulling policies, LGBTQ students continue to endure higher incidents of bullying and harassment than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (e.g., Kosciw et al., 2016; Kull et al., 2015). In fact, non-LGBTQ inclusive anti-bullying policies are as damaging to LGBTQ students as not having anti-bullying district policies at all (Kull et al., 2015). Furthermore, even when anti-bullying policies are inclusive of LGBT students, these policies are not appropriately disseminated among students and staff. For example, compared to 80% of students who were aware of general anti-bullying and harassment policies, only 18% of students were aware of LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying laws (Kull et al., 2015).

Policies and laws are largely influenced by the social and political contexts of their particular geographic region (DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009). Although recent national momentum has put LGBTQ issues in the spotlight, some researchers assert that LGBTQ laws and policies in schools continue to operate from a deficit framework and receive less attention than other areas of diversity, or are simply ignored altogether (Payne & Smith, 2014). In addition, school boards and administrators who are not supportive of LGBTQ students continue to use fear and extreme measures when developing policies that may ultimately promote the oppression and risk the safety of these students in schools (Mercier, 2009). One such law that has been put in place to prevent LGBTQ-inclusive education from taking place at the national level is "No Promo Homo." As of 2015, nine states (i.e., Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah) have "No Promo Homo" laws. This law either directs school officials to take a neutral position about sexual and gender identity or prohibits any school discussion and services to promote the well-being of LGBTQ students (Lenson, 2015). For example, Texas mandates that schools teach that non-heterosexuality is an unacceptable lifestyle and a criminal offense. In Arizona, the law prohibits school districts from portraying non-heterosexuality as a positive sexual identity, and instead, mandates that schools emphasize in their curriculum that all forms (e.g., protected or unprotected) of same-sex sex are not safe.

As a result of the increased attention to LGBTQ issues, some states have started to make progress toward creating inclusive policies. For example, recently 15 states (e.g., California, Florida, Minnesota, and South Dakota) have adopted eligibility rules that explicitly permit transgender students to participate in school sports consistent with

their gender identity (Orr et al., 2015). There has also been recent progress for transgender rights at the school level. In 2015 a complaint made by a transgender student in the Arcadia Unified School District (California), led the Department of Justice and Office of Civil Rights to approve a nondiscriminatory policy for transgender students. This change in policy states that schools must acknowledge and treat students according to the gender with which they identify (Orr et al., 2015).

Despite recent advances in LGBTQ rights in the United States, oppressive school laws and policies (e.g., No Promo Homo) continue to be introduced and passed. These laws prevent schools from creating safe spaces and affirming resources for LGBTQ youth (Russell, Kosciw, Horn, & Saewyc, 2010), and deliver the message that heterosexuality and opposite-sex sexuality is the only form of healthy sexuality. As suggested in a recent study with over 3000 teachers and 100 school principals (Russell, Day, Ioverno, & Toomey, 2016), the presence of multiple LGBTQ-inclusive policies may have a greater impact on the well-being of LGBTQ students than any one policy. For example, even though GSA groups in schools have been associated with an increase of positive outcomes for LGBTQ students (e.g., lower health-risky behaviors, less truancy, greater sense of connectedness; Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013; Toomey & Russell, 2013), simply having a policy allowing GSA groups in schools might not be enough to provide a safe environment for LGBTQ students (Liboro, Travers, & St. John, 2015). Advocacy for the development of inclusive, broader policies (at the national and state level) is needed to effect change. Specifically identifying LGBTQ individuals in policies can help increase awareness of such issues. PSCs are well positioned to protect LGBTQ students in schools by advocating to policy makers, administrators, and other

school personnel and working with them to develop and include broader, inclusive policies.

Myth #7: LGBTQ students are safe around all school personnel. Support from school personnel is a concern for LGBTQ students. According to GLSEN's latest National School Climate Survey, over half of the students reported hearing homophobic (56%) remarks from teachers or school staff, and most LGBTQ students (57%) did not report harassment or assaults to school staff because they doubted that they would intervene or worried that the situation would worsen. Of the students who did report an incident of harassment or assault, 63.5% said that school staff ignored their report (Kosciw et al., 2016). Staff who respond inconsistently or never intervene on behalf of LGBTQ students often exacerbate the high incidence of harassment and assault (Kosciw et al., 2016).

Furthermore, data suggests that LGBTQ students experience harsher disciplinary actions by school personnel than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts. One recent study found that LGBTQ students faced more severe consequences for public display of same-sex affection and gender non-conforming behaviors than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015). In addition, when LGBTQ students try to defend themselves physically and emotionally from aggressors, they are often seen as the initiator and are punished, resulting in suspension or exclusion from school (e.g., Golgowki, 2014). Although LGBTQ students are disproportionally the target of victimization, several studies have concluded that when LGBTQ students are harassed at school due to their sexual and gender identity, seldom do teachers and other school personnel intervene but often

blame and punish the behavior of the LGBTQ student (e.g., Majd, Marksamer, & Reyes, 2009; Russell, Sinclair, Poteat, & Koenig, 2012; Snapp et al., 2015). Thus, the lack of support for LGBTQ students by some school personnel further perpetrates the oppression of these students and puts them at risk. Training for school personnel and administrators on these issues is needed so that LGBTQ students are treated fairly and protected (Hall et al., 2013). PSCs can provide or be involved in the development of such training to educate school personnel and assist them in becoming more culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of LGBTQ students.

Myth #8: Sex education is inclusive of all students. LGBTQ issues are often omitted from sex education in schools (e.g., Formby 2011, 2016). Despite the need for LGBTQ-inclusive sex education, the invisibility of this vulnerable population continues to be supported by misconceptions and non-inclusive standards at the school, district, and national level. At the school and district level, research suggests that an inclusive sex education curriculum is often absent due to discomfort, embarrassment, and lack of confidence from teachers and other staff members (e.g., Formby, 2011). This discomfort is often grounded in the erroneous belief that, by acknowledging that sexuality between two people of the same sex is common and healthy, it will "turn" students gay (Flores, 2014; Formby, 2013). Additional sources of shame and discomfort include complaints from parents and teachers with deeply held religious beliefs that may be ignorant due to a lack of knowledge or training on LGBTQ issues (Flores, 2014; Formby, 2011, 2013).

Since its dawn, sex education in the U.S. has been traditionally grounded in abstinence-only curricula (Elia & Eliason, 2010). Although this curricular viewpoint

persisted for decades, the increase in sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), the onset

of the AIDS epidemic, and an increase in teen pregnancy, led educators in the 1980s to

acknowledge that an abstinence-only curriculum was failing. The curriculum needed to

educate students about prevention and contraception (Elia & Eliason, 2010; Mauer,

2009). However, even under this new curriculum, information on the sexuality and

needs of LGBTQ students was not included. In the early 1990's, there was a push for

national standards that were more comprehensive. As a result, the Sexuality

Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS), a taskforce composed of

representatives from the U.S. CDC, the National Education Association, and other

health and education organizations was formed (Abreu et al., 2014; SIECUS, 2004). By

1991, the taskforce released the Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education

(SIECUS, 2004). However, the Guidelines did not provide educators with specific tools

or clear directions on addressing the needs of LGBTQ students. The Guidelines were

aspirational with very little action from individual schools and districts to address the

needs of LGBTQ students (Abreu et al., 2014; McCarty-Caplan, 2015).

Under the Health Care Reform legislation of 2010, more supportive and

comprehensive sexuality education was initiated (SIECUS, 2004). For example, in an

attempt to provide states with grants to implement evidence-based comprehensive sex

education programs for young adults, the Personal Responsibility Education Program

(PREP) was established (SIECUS, 2004). This reform was unsuccessful in providing

substantial support for LGBTQ populations. PREP claimed to attend to the needs of

LGBTQ people but failed to provide policy language or curricular content inclusive of

LGBTQ students (McCarty-Caplan, 2015). PSCs can take a leadership role working

with administrators and teachers to create inclusive sex education curricula and conduct psycho-educational workshops. These workshops can also help individuals share thoughts, feelings, and dispel myths they may harbor about these youth.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

As they implement the ASCA National Model (2012) and ASCA's Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success (2014), PSCs must advocate for social justice, equity, and equal access for all students at all levels through comprehensive, developmental school counseling programs. This requires being cognizant of policies and procedures established to support the needs of LGBTQ students and addressing with school personnel any inequities in policies and instructional practices that impede the academic, career, and personal adjustment progress of these students (ASCA, 2012). PSCs advocate for systemic change and can clarify misconceptions about the needs and challenges faced by LGBTQ students by educating students, teachers, administrators, parents, and others involved in students' lives.

The revised *ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors* (2016) now includes a specific standard on bullying, harassment, and child abuse (Standard A.11) that states PSCs "report to the administration all incidents of bullying, dating violence and sexual harassment" (p. 5) as these require administrative interventions under federal and state laws. Under Standard A.11, PSCs are ethically bound to provide appropriate services to victims and perpetrators which can include developing safety plans and "reasonable" accommodations for victims as needed. Under Standard A.10, Underserved and At-risk Populations, PSCs' have an ethical responsibility to help maintain safe, respectful, and non-discriminatory school environments. Standard A.10.e also specifically addresses

the right of students to be treated "consistent with their gender identity" and to be "free from any form of discipline, harassment, or discrimination based on their gender identity or gender expression" (p. 5). Similarly, a position statement issued by ASCA (2014a) on the counselors' role in the well-being of LGBTQ youth states that, "Professional school counselors also promote awareness of issues related to sexual orientation/gender identity among students, teachers administrators, parents and the community" (p. 39) and "promote policies that denounce the use of offensive language, harassment, and bullying that lead to a hostile school environment" (p. 38). These guidelines imply that school counselors must be aware and take action to promote and protect the safety of LGBTQ students.

Hostile school climates and school victimization can have negative academic and psychological impact on LGBTQ students (Kosciw et al., 2016). PSCs must be involved in creating positive school climates that are welcoming and safe for every student (DePaul et al., 2009; Pompei, 2012). Since many LGBTQ students are often ostracized, harassed, and the victims of bullying and violence, PSCs must help these students become socially connected to others (Kosciw et al., 2016). Historically the term *ally* has been used to describe a person who confronts heterosexism, sexism, homoprejudice, and heterosexual privilege in self and others (Marszalek & Logan, 2014). The goal for PSC's would be to become allies for *all* students, including LGBTQ students, in their schools.

PSCs can become actively involved at the national, state, district, and school levels in creating and implementing comprehensive anti-bullying and harassment policies that include protections against sexual orientation and gender identity (Leonardi

& Staley, 2015). When developing the school counseling curriculum, PSCs ensure that the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success (2014b) are implemented. PSCs are encouraged to consult their state standards and competencies to align them with ASCA's Mindsets and Behaviors (2014b) and to address those that are pertinent to the respect and understanding of self and others, social justice, and equity issues in schools. Terminology that promotes the inclusion of LGBTQ students should be used along with sponsoring activities and events, such as National Coming Out Day (October 11), for and about LGBTQ students. PSCs can organize clubs (e.g., GSA) that help LGBTQ students connect with others and ensure that all students who participate feel welcomed (Kosciw et al., 2016).

Before initiating services and developing school-based programs for LGBTQ youth, PSCs should consider the readiness of their school community (e.g., students, teachers, administrators, and staff), their openness toward acceptance of LGBTQ youth, and the amount of education and training they have received. School personnel who lack education and training on LGBTQ youth concern might be reluctant to provide support because they do not feel prepared to respond to the needs of these students (Kolbert et al., 2015). Being sensitive to community needs and taking a developmental approach is recommended (Estrada et al., 2017). For example, before starting LGBTQ support groups at their school, PSCs might begin by connecting students with supportive adults from the school and local community willing to serve as mentors (Kolbert et al., 2015). PSCs can then continue to provide education by making available educational resources and opportunities (e.g., websites, reading materials, workshops)

to all school personnel, while slowly introducing programs and services that create safe school environments and that foster acceptance and equality.

Studies suggest that some counselors may not be prepared to work with sexual minority and gender expansive clients and may hold homophobic attitudes toward them (Hall et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2016; Lloyd-Haslett & Foster, 2013). This lack of preparation and knowledge can negatively impact the services provided and must be addressed by counseling pre-service and district in-service programs. Further, PSCs have a responsibility to acknowledge their personal biases and lack of knowledge about LGBTQ students and seek training to better understand the needs of this population (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; ASCA, 2016; Hall, et al., 2013). ASCA Ethical Standards (2016) indicate PSCs ethically cannot refuse to work with or refuse to provide services to students based on their personal values and beliefs. Training and supervision should be sought when these get in the way of providing services.

The American Psychological Association (APA; 2016) has developed free, online modules, the *Respect Online Course,* to teach professionals how to provide instruction on LGBTQ issues and maintaining safe sex. The modules include information on the stigmas faced by LGBTQ youth, school wide protective practices to maintain safe and nurturing school environments, and resources for school wide interventions. Counselor education faculty members have a responsibility to ensure that their pre-service training of school counselors includes content and practice in working with LGBTQ students. They must also be attentive to identifying future counselors who may engage in oppressive practices and help them work through their biases and prejudices before they become practitioners (See Dugger & Francis, 2014; Kaplan, 2014 for details of the

case of Julea Ward, a school counseling student who refused to counsel a client on the basis of the client's sexual identity).

PSCs must make local and national resources available to LGBTQ students, and for the college bound, information about institutions of higher education that will be supportive, safe learning environments (Roe, 2013). Resources can include websites, videos, and hard copy materials on appropriate terminology and definitions, life experiences of LGBTQ youth, personal and professional issues encountered, advocacy, service, and social networking organizations, and include guest speakers and mentors to serve as role models and confidants (Case & Meier, 2014; DePaul et al., 2009; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010).

Future research should focus on the effectiveness of counseling practices that provide inclusive curricula and specific interventions aimed at educating all students and school personnel on the needs of sexual minority and gender expansive youth and ways to provide support to create safe school environments. Of importance would be further research on the effect of bullying and harassment on sexual minority and gender expansive youth and the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs to combat this behavior. Further investigations could provide empirical evidence on the extent to which the myths and misconceptions, discussed in this paper, exist in schools.

Conclusion

Sexual minority and gender expansive youth face the daunting developmental tasks of adolescence with the additional charge of coping with systemic oppression (Marszalek & Logan, 2014). These youth can be subject to harassment and non-inclusive curriculums that may result in severe mental health concerns. A critical role of

PSCs working with LGBTQ students in schools is to advocate on their behalf and to play an active part in helping schools create and sustain supportive and safe learning environments. PSCs can combat the myths and misconceptions discussed in this paper by: (a) reflecting and working through personal biases and beliefs, (b) educating others, (c) connecting with and gaining a better understanding of LGBTQ students and their needs, (d) providing individual and school-wide interventions to *all students*, and (e) working with policy stakeholders to promote equitable school and community policies.

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Appendix A

Terminology for Sexual Minority and Gender Expansive Youth

Bisexual: A male or female who has a sexual and/or psychological attraction toward both males and females.

Cisgender: People whose birth sex is consistent with the gender identity and expression considered appropriate by society.

Gay: A man who has emotional, social, psychological, and/or physical attraction to other men.

Gender: The social construction of masculinity and femininity in a specific culture in time. It involves gender assignment (the gender designation of someone at birth), gender roles (the expectations imposed on someone based on their gender), gender attribution (how others perceive someone's gender), and gender identity (how someone defines their own gender).

Gender Expansive: Previously discussed as gender non-conforming. More flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system.

Heterosexism: The belief in the superiority of heterosexuality that is supported by the cultural and institutional practices of society. Also, the assumption that all people are heterosexual and that heterosexuality is right, correct, and normal.

Homosexual: A clinical term for people having emotional, physical, and sexual responses primarily to members of the same gender. Many sexual minorities find this term offensive because it is a clinical term assigned to them by others. It is always preferable to ask someone how they identify.

Lesbian: A woman who has emotional, social, psychological, and/or physical attraction to other women.

Queer: Once a derogatory term, the word "queer" has been embraced by the gay and lesbian community, and is used as an umbrella term for all sexual minorities. A political statement, as well as an identity, which advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as fluid. A simple label to explain a complex set of sexual behaviors and desires. Use some caution, as levels of acceptance of this term varies by individual.

Sexual Minority: A group of various sexual identities, orientations, and/or practices that are different from the majority (or heterosexuality).

Sexual Orientation or Identity: How one thinks of one self in terms of whom one is or is not emotionally, socially, psychologically, and/or physically. For some it is innate and never changing for others it is fluid across time and contexts.

Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual identity or behavior.

Note. These definitions were adapted from Abreu, R. L., Mosley, D., & Wheeler, W. (2014). Gender Expansive and Sexual Minority Inclusive Curricula: A Guide for Educators. In M. C. Kenny (Ed.), *Sex Education: Attitudes of Adolescents, Cultural Differences and Schools' Challenges* (pp.243-276). Hauppauge, NY: Nova Publishers.

Appendix B

Web-Based Resources for Counselors

Program	Content	Website
A Queer Endeavor	This site provides teachers, school staff, families, and students with resources (e.g., videos, lesson plans, curriculum development best practices, and textbook recommendations) to help support and create an inclusive school environment for sexual minority and gender expansive students.	http://www.aqueer endeavor.org/
Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)- Educator Resources Corner	Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) is one of the largest nation's advocacy group that focuses on providing resources that promote the well-being of sexual minority and gender expansive students, K-12. The Educator Resource Corner provides tools for LGBTQ-inclusive school-wide advocacy programming and lesson plans.	http://www.glsen.org/ educate/resources
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)	Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) strives to educate, advocate, and promote the dissemination of accurate information about comprehensive and socially just sexuality education. SIECUS's educational resources serve as training programs for teachers, school personnel, and policy-makers.	http://www.siecus.org/
Family Acceptance Project (FAP)	The Family Acceptance Project (FAP), directed by Dr. Caitlin Ryan, includes the first major study of LGBT youth and their families. Some specific goals of this project are to: (a) study parents', families' and caregivers' reactions and adjustment to an adolescent's coming out as LGBT, (b) provide training and assessment materials for mental health provides, school personnel, and community leaders to effectively work with LGBTQ children and adolescents and their families, (c) develop resources to support LGBT children and adolescents and their families, and (c) develop family-centered interventions to prevent health and mental health risks, keep families together, and promote well-being for LGBT children and adolescents.	https://familyproject.sfsu. edu/overview

Web-Based Resources for Counselors

Program	Content	Website
Safe and Supportive School Project: American Psychological Association	Safe and Supportive School Project by the American Psychological Association partners with five professional organizations to provide training and educational resources to help school personnel, leaders of community organizations, parents and youths to build positive, supportive, and healthy environments that promote acceptance and allows LGBTQ children and adolescents to thrive as their authentic selves.	http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/programs/safe-supportive/default.aspx
U.S. Department of Education: Sexual Harassment Resources	U.S. Department of Education: Sexual Harassment Resources provides a series of documents that defines and describes what constitutes sexual harassment according to the law, including frequently asked questions and a check list for addressing harassment. Considering that LGBTQ students report high numbers of multiple forms of harassment in schools, these resources would be helpful for counselors to better understand the regal ramifications of harassment toward LGBTQ students, including training other school personnel.	http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/sexharassresources.html
It's Pronounced Metrosexual	It's Pronounced Metrosexual is provides online resources (e.g., worksheets, videos, articles, books) about privilege and oppression overall, with an emphasis on educating society about topics related to sexual and gender identity. This site serves as a source of information for advocates of social justice, researchers, and clinicians.	http://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/#sthash.hDB5E4x6.dpbs

Biographical Statements

Roberto L. Abreu, M.S., Ed.S., NCC, is a doctoral candidate in counseling psychology at the University of Kentucky. Roberto's research interests include sexual minority and gender expansive youth, with an emphasis on Latina/o LGBTQ youth and parental, school, and community acceptance and support. Roberto's clinical experience includes working with children and adolescents on the autism spectrum, LGBT teenagers and young adults, college students, immigrant families, and incarcerated men and women with severe mental illness. Email: r.abre001@uky.edu

Adriana G. McEachern Ph.D, NCC, NCRC, LMHC is a professor emerita in the counselor education program in the College of Arts, Sciences, and Education at Florida International University, Miami, Florida. Her research interests and publications have focused on physical and sexual abuse and emotional maltreatment, exceptional student education, learning disabilities, and other mental health topics. Email: mceacher@fiu.edu

Maureen C. Kenny, Ph.D., NBCC, is a professor and clinical coordinator of the counselor education program in the College of Arts, Sciences and Education at Florida International University, Miami, Florida. Dr. Kenny's research has examined trauma and sexual abuse in children, with a focus on sexual abuse prevention for ethnic minorities. In addition, she has examined barriers to abuse reporting for mandated reporters. Email: kennym@fiu.edu