

FORECASTING AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE: SCHOOL COUNSELING STRATEGIES TO DECONSTRUCT EDUCATIONAL HETERONORMMCMCID



The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has asserted that an important role of school counselors is to identify and eliminate barriers that prohibit students from accessing high quality education. For lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, questioning, and ally (LGBTQIQA) youth, barriers exist within K-12 education environments, inhibiting educational experiences and contributing to hostile school climates (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). One barrier to equal access to education for LGBTQIQA youth is heteronormative beliefs that saturate educational policies, practices, and environments (Atkinson & DePalma, 2010; Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007), such as educational heteronormativity. Educational heteronormativity is defined as “the organizational structures in schools that support heterosexuality as normal and anything else as deviant” (Donelson & Rogers, 2004, p. 128). For example, discussions of difference occur within schools, such as lessons on racial, political, or religious injustice; however, sexual and gender identity are often excluded from the course of instruction. This exclusion is due to a reluctance to discuss sexual and gender identity out of fear, personal beliefs, lack of understanding, and tradition (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). Therefore, educational heteronormativity persists within educational environments as evidenced by exclusion of sexual and gender identity in curricula, instruc-

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(2011) conducted a Delphi study to generate consensus among a panel of 35 school counselors and school counselor educators to develop classroom management strategies for school counselors to employ. The Delphi method also has been used to define the role of school counselors in post-secondary planning for students with autism spectrum disorders (Krell & Pérusse, 2012) and learning disabilities (Milsom & Dietz, 2009). When examined as a whole, these studies utilized the knowledge of experts to better understand the unique roles of school counselors, while providing suggestions for informed school counselor preparation and practice.

METHOD

The researcher selected the Delphi method as an initial step to generate strategies to deconstruct educational heteronormativity due to the complex nature of embedded heteronormativity within educational systems. This method was developed as a forecasting strategy to generate information about phenomena that lack an established knowledge base (Ziglio, 1996). Thus, the Delphi method was designed to deconstruct educational

Demographic Information

The sample consisted of nine females (64%), four males (28%), and one participant who identified as male and gender-variant (7%). The sample was 100% White with a mean participant age of 37.54 (range of 22; 30-52). Ten panelists held doctoral degrees in counselor education and four held master's degrees in counseling. Eleven panelists reported experience as a school counselor, 10 reported experience as a counselor educator, and six identified as a researcher. Panelists could select more than one category of professional experience, hence the higher number of experiences than panelists. The collective sample demonstrated expertise pertaining to the educational needs of LGBTQIQA youth through the publication of 34 journal articles, 96 professional presentations, 12 book chapters, nine funded research grants, three outstanding achievement awards, and extensive professional service at district, regional, and national levels.

information provided by the panel using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998). Reviewers independently and systematically examined panelists' responses between cases to construct similar groups of strategies. After each reviewer constructed an initial list, the results were compared and themes were established. Participant responses were then clustered based on similarity to synthesize and collapse the responses into discrete strategies for each theme. The following overarching themes were agreed upon for the final organization structure: (a) advocacy, (b) protection and enforcement, (c) allies and collaboration, (d) curriculum reform, (e) inclusive language, (f) policy change to promote inclusion, (g) professional development for change, (h) rituals and ethos that promote inclusion, and (i) signs of acceptance and inclusive facilities.

The themes identified in the generative round were used to organize the panelists' lists of strategies. This list was uploaded to an online survey

ans and interquartile ranges (IQRs) for each strategy, and strategies with medians ≥ 6 and IQRs ≤ 1.50 were retained for subsequent rounds of questioning (Jenkins & Smith, 1994).

The third round of questioning further refined the strategies retained in round two and demonstrated stability of responses. An online survey link was provided containing the retained strategies accompanied by each strategy's respective median and IQR. Panelists were asked to review the revised list of strategies and re-rate each strategy while considering the group ratings. This questionnaire had an open-ended prompt eliciting comments, questions, or concerns regarding the retained strategies and iterative questioning process. Based on the threshold criteria, the study concluded when consensus was achieved and a final list of strategies was constructed. These strategies were disseminated to panelists for final review and comment (see Table 1).

Trustworthiness

Credibility refers to whether or not data collection and results of a study are representative of the research questions under investigation and participants' perspectives (Krefting, 1991). Precautions to ensure credibility in the current study included the iterative questioning process, member checking, ongoing panelist involvement, and prolonged engagement with panelists (Krefting, 1991; Merriam, 1998). Further supporting credibility were detailed procedural guidelines that were continuously reviewed by the author and two research advisors. Inclusion of an external reviewer also augmented credibility by reducing the influence of researcher bias throughout the data analysis and results. The author engaged in a reflexive process to account for researcher bias through bracketing strategies and a research journal (Merriam, 1998).

According to Creswell (2013), "all writing is positioned and within a stance" (p. 215), meaning an author's lived experiences will influence the

EDUCATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS REPORT RELUCTANCE TO DISCUSS SEXUAL AND GENDER IDENTITY OUT OF FEAR, PERSONAL BELIEFS, LACK OF UNDERSTANDING, AND TRADITION.

Data Collection Procedures

The generative round consisted of a broad prompt designed to elicit exploration of school counselors' roles in deconstructing educational heteronormativity through intentional practice (Ziglio, 1996). Panelists were provided a rationale for the study and definitions of educational heteronormativity and deconstruction to ensure panelists were conceptualizing the prompt in a similar manner. Panelists were then asked to generate a list of school counseling strategies to deconstruct educational heteronormativity in K-12 public education environments.

The author and one external reviewer with advanced knowledge of qualitative data analysis analyzed

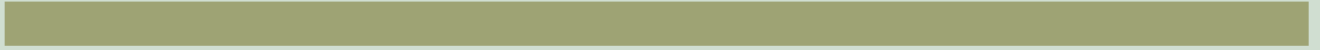
platform to facilitate the iterative questioning process while maintaining panelists' anonymity. Panelists were asked to rate each strategy by level of relevance based on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Level of relevance ranged from 1 (not relevant) to 7 (highly relevant). Panelists were instructed to gauge relevance pertaining to how school counselors can deconstruct educational heteronormativity in K-12 public education environments. Panelists were asked to consider variance across ratings, as it was likely all strategies were not equally relevant. They were asked to explain the conditions used to rate strategies and comment on the process and resulting strategy list. The researchers calculated medi-

TABLE 1

SCHOOL COUNSELING STRATEGIES TO DECONSTRUCT EDUCATIONAL HETERONORMATIVITY

Strategy	Frequency	Impact
A1. Advocate for school, district, and community level professional development/psycho-education on LGBTQIQA student needs	7	1
A2. Advocate to promote social justice, advocacy, and equality principles in student organizations, school curricula, and school-wide activities	7	1
A3. Identify and share LGBTQIQA-specific resources (both people and materials) with students, teachers, administrators, guardians, school counselors, school counseling district coordinators, etc.	7	1
A4. Advocate for policies requiring teachers and administrators to respect a student's "out" status; they must have permission from the student prior to disclosing LGBTQIQA status	7	1
A5. Advocate for LGBTQIQA visibility	7	1
A6. Advocate for policies requiring school employees to honor gender pronouns that students use	7	1
A7. Challenge gender, sexual orientation, and family binaries by talking about different ways of being and different types of family with staff and students	7	1.25
A8. Provide students with information/training on self-advocacy	7	1

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questions asked and the aspects one decides to attend to while conducting research. The primary researcher and author of this study was a White woman, with personal and professional experience with the effects of heteronormativity in K-12 schools. At the time of the study, the author was a practicing school counselor at the middle school level. The external reviewer assisting in data analysis was a White male who was employed as a middle school counselor. Throughout this study, the author received ongoing

(Willoughby, 2012) may be advantageous for providing an accessible framework for school communities. The _____ curriculum offers a concise model for educational stakeholders to address bias and

attempt to have equal representation of practitioners; however, practicing school counselors were more challenging to distinguish, and interestingly, several practitioners contacted by the author seemed concerned about how they had been identified.

Another limitation of this study is the use of Likert-type scales, which are questionable due to subjectivity of a numeric point scale and effects of social desirability or intentional deviation (Moseley & Mead, 2001). The length of the surveys may have been a limitation because of fatigue. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the Delphi process may force consensus among panelists because of social desirability to align with majority ratings from previous rounds (Geist, 2008). Delphi studies often include panelists' explanations of responses beyond group ratings; however, panelists may be more likely to conform to group ratings when required to comment on their disagreement prior to moving forward, thus rushing consensus (Geist, 2008). To account for this limitation, comments regarding divergence were optional. Nevertheless, a definitive definition of consensus and whether or not true consensus is ever achieved remain limitations of this methodology (Rowe & Wright, 1999).

Directions for Future Research

The results of this study are suggestions that must be considered within the context of this study and additional research is needed to determine effectiveness of the results. Because of the complexity of educational heteronormativity and the amount of information gleaned from the generative round, rating items on more than one attribute was beyond the scope of this study. However, to provide insight into the application of the results, a survey of educational stakeholders to distinguish between importance and chronological relevance might be beneficial. For example, if school counselors working in resistant environments had guidance as to which strategies to implement first, the results might be more accessible to practitioners.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE STRATEGIES REQUIRES THOUGHTFUL APPLICATION AND ADAPTATION TO MEET THE

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