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

This Delphi study engaged a panel of 14 school counselor educators and school counselors in a critical discourse to generate school counseling strategies to deconstruct educational heteronormativity. This study resulted in 51 school counseling strategies that school counselors can employ to deconstruct educational heteronormativity. This article also provides an introduction to heteronormativity and queer theory to demonstrate how school counselors can engage in social justice advocacy through intentional practice.

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 rarely included in this discourse (Atkinson & DePalma, 2010; Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007). In fact, educational stakeholders report 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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tional practices, documents, resources, images, clubs, athletics, and language (Atkinson & DePalma, 2010; Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007).

Educational heteronormativity has negative effects on the educational experiences of LGBTQIQA youth. According to a National Climate Survey, LGBTQIQA individuals experience harassment and victimization as a result of their sexual orientation and gender identities (Kosciw et al., 2014). LGBTQIQA students reported feeling unsafe and indicated that they avoided school and believed their access to education had been inhibited because of hostile school climates (Kosciw et al., 2014). Further, evidence suggests LGBTQIQA youth exhibit negative educational outcomes such as truancy, detachment from school, and poor achievement (Kosciw et al., 2014). To this end, the field of school counseling has a responsibility to facilitate institutional reform to deconstruct heteronormative structures within schools. The purpose of this study was to identify school counseling strategies to deconstruct educational heteronormativity through intentional practice. In this study, deconstruction represents the critical examination of dominant narratives that perpetuate oppressive institutional norms.

guardians, peers, or other stakeholders to increase support, acceptance, and access to resources (DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009). At the group level, literature supports small counseling groups (Craig, 2013; Curry & Hayes, 2009) and classroom guidance curricula (Curry & Hayes, 2009; DePaul et al., 2009). Craig's (2013) noteworthy group counseling model, Affirmative Supportive Safe and Empowering Talk (ASSET), illustrates the importance of fostering resilience and moderating stress of marginalization through school-based group counseling.

Systemic intervention is characterized by having an understanding of current school climate, followed by proactive efforts to increase positive representations of alternative gender and sexuality narratives (Harper & Singh, 2013). Authors have provided suggestions for school counselors to increase representation of LGBTQIQA narratives by transforming schools into safe spaces (Bidell, 2011; Harper & Singh, 2013). Safe spaces include visible representation of LGBTQIQA affirmative symbols and Safe Zone signs, alerting the school community that the person endorsing the space is an ally. Bidell (2011) offered additional suggestions such as initiating a day of silence and no name-calling

ors may assist students in promoting GSAs, recruiting members, procuring space, and ensuring GSAs remain safe and respectful for all students (Bidell, 2011). School counselors may also have the role of soliciting support of educational stakeholders in environments where resistance to such groups may exist.

Although LGBTQIQA-affirmative school counseling practices are essential, research is limited regarding school counselors' roles in addressing systemic barriers to inclusivity. Thus, in concordance with a social justice paradigm, school counselors must shift attention to the critical examination of educational environments and social structures perpetuating inequality. Understanding heteronormativity is efficacious for facilitating the educational reform needed for LGBTQIQA inclusivity. Therefore, this study sought to illuminate practical strategies for initiating small changes in challenging educational heteronormativity that may lead to substantive change over time.

School Counseling Delphi Studies

Delphi studies in school counseling have been a catalyst for more intentional professional identity development, training, research, and practice. One such study conducted by Dimmitt, Carey, McGannon, and Henningson (2005) surveyed 21 school counselors and school counselor educators to construct research questions to guide the future success and development of the field. Since that time, the results of the study have provided direction for substantive outcome research in school counseling, demonstrating how the Delphi method can initiate future empirical research by refining complex phenomena within the field (Dimmitt et al., 2005).

Solmonson, Roaten, and Sawyer (2011) used the Delphi method to raise awareness about hiring practices of school counselors, elucidating a need for improved training, assessment, and oversight through school district–university partnerships. Geltner, Cunningham, and Caldwell

ONE BARRIER TO EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR LGBTQIQA YOUTH IS HETERONORMATIVE BELIEFS THAT SATURATE EDUCATIONAL POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND ENVIRONMENTS.

Current School Counseling Practices

Because they represent a historically marginalized group, LGBTQIQA students need the support of school counselors at various levels of intervention (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2016). At the individual level, Curry and Hayes (2009) suggested facilitating rapport with LGBT youth through narrative, bibliotherapy, and arts-based counseling. School counselors may also assist students in communicating with

or no hate weeks. In addition, Cerezo and Bergfeld (2013) asserted that school counselors should promote counterspaces for LGBTQIQA youth. Counterspaces are groups that explore the history of oppression and strive for improved understanding of skills to combat oppressive conditions (Cerezo & Bergfeld, 2013). Though not analogous, Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) are similar in that both groups challenge oppressive conditions for LGBTQIQA individuals. Although typically student-led, school counsel-

(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 postsecondary 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 clarify complex phenomena and guide future practice (Ziglio, 1996), which made it an advantageous technique to develop school counseling strategies to deconstruct heteronormativity.

The Delphi method is characterized by an iterative process of questioning and controlled feedback to generate consensus among an expert panel (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). The first questioning round utilizes broad prompts to gather information from panelists about the topic under investigation (Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Ziglio, 1996). The information gleaned from round one is then distilled to construct a questionnaire, which is used for subsequent rounds of questioning (Ziglio, 1996). These systematic questionnaires determine panelists' levels of agreement, disagreement, understanding, and opinions regarding importance, desirability, and feasibility of the previously constructed responses (Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Ziglio, 1996). This systematic questioning continues with controlled feedback typically in the form of aggregated measurements of central tendency and variance, and refinement of responses until consensus is achieved (Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Ziglio, 1996).

The following research question guided this study: how can school counselors deconstruct educational heteronormativity in K-12 public education environments to facilitate institutional reform?

Queer Theory

In conducting this Delphi method study, the researcher used Queer theory as a conceptual framework. Queer theory acknowledges that sexual and gender identity are defined through constructions of values, beliefs, and language to position some individuals in power, while disenfranchising others (Watson, 2005). Queer theorists challenge binary assumptions, suggesting the exclusion of variance has positioned those who do not identify as heterosexual and cisgender as deviant (Foucault, 1984). Through constructions of meaning, Queer theory denotes that social systems develop and sustain through language, rules, and the inclusion or exclusion of knowledge to create regulatory practices (Foucault, 1984). Although people create regulatory practices through values and beliefs, these practices sustain over time and begin to shape the thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs of individuals (Foucault, 1984). Heteronormativity is one such regulatory practice influencing social systems and individuals' lives. Critical theories also ignited a paradigm shift from studying diversity by learning about individuals or groups, to the examination of regulatory practices that privilege some over others (Watson, 2005).

Panelists

The researcher used Delphi method selection criteria outlined by Baker, Lovell, and Harris (2006) to guide the identification of experts (i.e., representative of professional group, knowledge, experience, and ability to influence policy). Purposive sampling was used to identify panelists based on the following selection criteria. Professional qualifications for school counselor educators and school counselor researchers included an earned doctoral degree and current or recent employment as a school counselor educator or professional researcher. Professional qualifications for school counselor practitioners included an earned master's degree in school counseling, licensure, and current or recent employment as a school counselor. Panelists also met a minimum of one of the following criteria as they pertain to the educational needs of LGBTQIQA youth: authorship of a minimum of two publications or professional presentations within the past 5 years, visible leadership, participation or affiliation with professional organizations, or formal recognition because of their work with LGBTQIQA individuals.

Response Rate

The researcher contacted 35 individuals via email to solicit participation. Although 19 individuals expressed interest in participating, the final response rate for the first round of data collection was 40% (14 out of 35). Rounds two and three had 100% response rates, as all 14 panelists completed both rounds.

> ## EDUCATIONAL HETERONORMATIVITY IS DEFINED AS "THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES IN SCHOOLS THAT SUPPORT HETEROSEXUALITY AS NORMAL AND ANYTHING ELSE AS DEVIANT."

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).

Positioning the research team. 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 (*critically 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-

Item	Median	IQR
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	6	1
A9. Think systemically and advocate for LGBTQIQA-inclusive programming. Include levels of implementation across the service domains of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012), and within the scope of needs identified as salient to the successful development of LGBTQIQA individuals	6	1.25
PE1. Intervene when you hear microaggression, slurs, name calling, and discrimination, and model appropriate, immediate responses	7	0
PE2. Ensure faculty and staff are empowered to challenge LGBTQIQA bullying/victimization and that they do so consistently	7	1.25
PE3. Conduct classroom lessons on bullying with an emphasis on zero tolerance for LGBTQIQA victimization	6	0.5
PE4. Become aware of state and federal legislation and case law that provide protection for LGBTQIQA students and employees	6	1
PE5. Help identify an officer at each district responsible for ensuring compliance with state laws prohibiting discrimination and harassment in schools	6	1.25
AC1. Understand one's own identity as an ally for LGBTQIQA individuals while maintaining professional relationships with other stakeholders in the system	6	1
AC2. Demonstrate knowledge of community resources for LGBTQIQA individuals and provide appropriate referrals when necessary (e.g., mental health, housing, clothing)	6	1
AC3. Create a LGBTQIQA peer leadership/peer counseling group of older students to support/mentor younger students	6	1
AC4. Provide small group counseling services for LGBTQIQA individuals	6	1.25
CR1. Ensure teachers include LGBTQIQA themes throughout curricula, and honor family diversity and gender diversity in their classroom lessons and discussions	7	1
CR2. Ensure access to books and other media resources that represent sexual and gender diversity and diverse family systems	7	1
CR3. Use current literature (e.g., National School Climate Surveys) on LGBTQIQA students to increase awareness, knowledge, and skills for teachers to infuse affirming resources into their classrooms	6.5	1
CR4. Conduct classroom lessons introducing heteronormativity, its impact, and strategies to challenge it	6.5	1
CR5. Advocate for teachers to include LGBTQIQA role-models, mainstream images, and representations of gender and sexual variance into curricula	6	1
CR6. Advocate for LGBTQIQA-inclusive social studies curricula	6	1
CR7. Conduct affirmative classroom lessons that attend to LGBTQIQA diversity and inclusivity	6	1
CR8. Construct career counseling interventions that attend to sexual and gender diversity	6	1.25

Item	Median	IQR
IL1. Use LGBTQIQA-affirming language to model best practice (e.g., partner; spouse; guardian)	7	0.25
IL2. Provide faculty and staff with strategies to handle anti-LGBTQIQA language and address the importance of responding to slurs (e.g., "that's so gay...")	7	1
IL3. Acknowledge and address sexism	7	1
IL4. Avoid heteronormative assumptions by listening, supporting, and using open-ended questions (e.g., "Who do you live with?" versus "Do you live with Mom and Dad?")	7	1.25
PC1. Review and revise school documents for pronoun usage and discussions about persons (e.g., mission statements, assessments, permission slips, check boxes for gender identity beyond male/female to include transgender and other)	7	1
PC2. Identify systemic barriers or challenges that prevent inclusivity for LGBTQIQA individuals	7	1
PC3. Ensure LGBTQIQA inclusivity at the policy level is maintained and consistently enforced	7	1.25
PC4. Conduct needs assessments exploring institutionalization of heteronormativity at various levels	6.5	1
PC5. Use strengths-oriented advocacy when communicating with school officials	6	1
PD1. Support ongoing professional development on LGBTQIQA topics	7	1
PD2. Provide supervision and support for teachers' and other school professionals' efforts to disrupt heteronormativity	7	1.25
PD3. Engage in ongoing professional development to maintain current knowledge of interventions, best practices, and language	6.5	1
PD4. Educate school employees about the potential legal liabilities (even personal liability) for failing to respond quickly and sufficiently to harassment of LGBTQIQA students in schools based on federal law and Title IX	6	1
PD5. Provide site-wide, LGBTQIQA-inclusive anti-bullying training	6	1.25
RE1. Encourage school-wide initiatives and recognition days to promote awareness, acceptance, and systemic change	7	1
RE2. Apply a social justice and equality framework within school counseling tasks (e.g., individual and group counseling, student lessons, consultation, data collection)	7	1
RE3. Focus on school-wide prevention and positive school climate for all students	7	1.25
RE4. Show empathy for LGBTQIQA individuals, be trustworthy, use humor (when appropriate and rapport is there), and provide validation, acceptance, empowerment, and affirmation	7	1.25
RE5. Advocate for LGBTQIQA inclusive proms/dances	6.5	1.25
RE6. Build on strengths to fight institutionalized oppression, foster resilience, and promote positive visibility (e.g., identify strengths; celebrate successes, history, and culture)	6	1
RE7. Use a "broaching" intake that invites students to share their identities – Day-Vines et al. (2007) defined broaching as "the counselor's ability to consider how sociopolitical factors such as race influence the client's counseling concerns" (p. 401)	6	1.25
RE8. Conduct annual focus groups with LGBTQIQA students and guardians to learn what the school is doing well and what needs to be improved	6	1.25
SA1. Ensure access to appropriate locker rooms, restrooms, gender-based activities, etc., that match gender identity	7	1
SA2. Distribute Safe Space icons/plaques and LGBTQIQA affirming posters throughout schools	7	1.25
SA3. Display helpline information for students in crisis	6.5	1.25

Note. The letters preceding the strategy demarcate the overarching theme. A–Advocacy; PE–Protection and Enforcement; AC–Allies and Collaboration; CR–Curriculum Reform; IL–Inclusive Language; PC–Policy Change to Promote Inclusion; PD–Professional Development for Change; RE–Rituals and Ethos that Promote Inclusion; SA–Signs of Acceptance and Inclusive Facilities

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 research advisement from two White, female counselor educators with extensive research experience in school counseling and counseling children and adolescents.

FINDINGS

The Position of an Expert

To better understand panelists' position as experts in LGBTQIQA inclusive school counseling, the author requested that panelists describe their inspiration and motivation to contribute to the improvement of the educational experiences of LGBTQIQA youth. Twelve of 14 panelists (86%) reported a direct connection with the marginalization of LGBTQIQA youth. Five panelists (36%) recounted experiences as school counselors in which they observed the struggle of LGBTQIQA youth. One participant stated, "I have witnessed and experienced resistance to my efforts to infuse LGBTQIQA programs and services into a developmental school counseling program." Another participant articulated, "as a former K-12 educator and school counselor, I became intimately aware of the marginalized experiences of LGBTQIQA youth, and continue to seek appropriate ways to advocate for their needs and intervene when they are denied equal treatment in heteronormative hallways." Numerous paritcipants also reflected on a lack of school counseling interventions to serve LGBTQIQA youth and their own experiences with "missed opportunities to intervene effectively in the past."

Questioning Rounds

The generative round of data collection yielded 266 distinct strategies. After organizing these strategies into overarching themes, reviewers clustered similar strategies to synthesize and collapse the responses, resulting in 111 strategies. Throughout the coding process, care was taken to use the language provided by panelists whenever possible to maintain the intended meaning of the responses. When disagreement occurred between the author and external reviewer regarding the meaning of a strategy, responses were retained to preserve panelists' language.

> ## THIS STUDY SOUGHT TO ILLUMINATE PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR INITIATING SMALL CHANGES IN CHALLENGING EDUCATIONAL HETERONORMATIVITY THAT MAY LEAD TO SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE OVER TIME.

The second questioning round was intended to determine panelist agreement pertaining to relevance of the strategies from the previous round (Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Ziglio, 1996). The 111 strategies were uploaded to an online survey for rating, resulting in 62 retained strategies. Of the strategies that did not meet the retention threshold, 32 were discarded for IQR variance > 1.5, six had medians of less than 6, and 11 strategies did not meet either criteria for retention.

In the third round, panelists re-rated each strategy in consideration of group ratings from the previous round to further distill the data (Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Ziglio, 1996). Panelists reached consensus on 51 strategies, eliminating seven strategies with an IQR greater than 1.5, and four strategies with medians of less than 6. This list was presented to panelists to ensure the final strategies represented their voices as experts. The final strategy list is organized by theme and listed in descending order by median and ascending order by IQR (Table 1).

DISCUSSION

In congruence with school counseling literature (ASCA, 2012, 2016), the role of school counselors as advocates emerged as the most robust cluster of strategies. Strategies illuminated the importance of advocating at various levels, as well as across the service domains of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012). The strategy, *conduct classroom lessons on bullying with an emphasis on zero tolerance for LGBTQIQA victimization*, requires attention. Although retained, panelists' comments conveyed controversy and concern surrounding the inclusion of "zero tolerance" language. Their comments were consistent with research correlating such policies with increased suspension, expulsion, and recidivism rates (e.g., Teske, 2011). Panelists' language was preserved to avoid altering the intended meaning; however, this strategy is questionable regarding consensus and educational best practice. Thus, the author advises reframing this strategy as *inclusion of classroom bullying lessons that include LGBTQIQA victimization*.

In alignment with ASCA (2016), panelists spoke to the value of inclusive language as a tool for school counselors to promote intentional inclusivity. Panelists endorsed avoiding heteronormative assumptions in language and actions to reduce sexism. Furthermore, the school counselor's role includes providing strategies for stakeholders to respond to biased language such as "that's so gay." Although not explicitly included in the results, the steps provided in *Speak Up at School: How to Respond to Everyday Prejudice, Bias and Stereotypes*

(Willoughby, 2012) may be advantageous for providing an accessible framework for school communities. The *Speak Up at School* curriculum offers a concise model for educational stakeholders to address bias and derogatory language to foster more inclusive educational environments (Willoughby, 2012).

An element of policy reform that reflected the role of school counselors is the utilization of *strengths-oriented advocacy when communicating with school officials*. According to Harper and Singh (2013), "although strengths-based approaches are not inherently systemic, it is because of systems of oppression that strengths-based approaches are necessary" (p. 409). Thus, if school counselors approach policy reform from a strengths-based perspective, they can begin deconstructing regulatory practices. Small adaptations such as document revisions allow space for variance beyond traditional binary systems of heterosexual or cisgender privilege. This reform positions school counselors to guide school officials to create policy changes that reflect resilience and inclusion, rather than policies focused on protecting disenfranchised groups.

The final theme, signs of acceptance and inclusive facilities, involved recommendations that school counselors *ensure access to appropriate locker rooms, restrooms, gender-based activities, etc., that match gender identity*. This strategy is essential, as national climate data indicated more than 35% of LGBT students "avoided gender-segregated spaces in school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable" (Kosciw et al., 2014, p. xvi). The second strategy, *distribute Safe Space icons/plaques and LGBTQIQA-affirming posters throughout schools* is also integral for inclusive educational

environments. According to Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, and Boesen (2014), the presence of Safe Space imagery throughout schools is associated with students' increased awareness of supportive adults and positive associations with faculty and staff.

Although Safe Space/Safe Zone icons are targeting LGBTQIQA indi-

PANELISTS SPOKE TO THE VALUE OF INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AS A TOOL FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS TO PROMOTE INTENTIONAL INCLUSIVITY.

viduals, which may not be viewed as congruent with the theoretical lens of this study, these icons are intended to be an explicit representation of providing space for alternative narratives. However, several panelists cautioned against haphazardly displaying Safe Space/Safe Zone icons. One participant commented, strategies "stating 'distribute Safe Zone stickers, pink triangles, rainbow stickers throughout' seemed less relevant because if a school is not affirming, having these stickers is sending a message that the school is safe when in fact it may not be, which will not protect youth." Thus, displaying images that promote acceptance and inclusion of all differences may be an advantageous alternative. Several resources are readily available to school counselors such as the *One World* poster series provided by the Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance program (https://www.splcenter.org/teaching-tolerance), or the various free posters available on the Safe Schools Coalition website (http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/).

Significance of the Study for the Practice of School Counseling
When reviewed individually, the strategies provided in this study are not new to education or counseling literature. The difference, and perhaps most salient implication for practitioners, is the method in which these strategies were assembled. In addition to generating consensus among experts,

the Delphi method relies on "anonymity, iteration, controlled feedback, and the statistical aggregation of group responses" (Rowe & Wright, 1999, p. 354) to distill the most relevant information. As such, this study is the first attempt to use an empirical method to systematically compile a list of best practices for deconstructing educational heteronormativity based on the knowledge of those with expertise in school counseling and educational needs of LGBTQIQA youth.

Although LGBTQIQA inclusive practices are expected, school counselors may not have the resources (e.g., time, access to databases) or desire to seek out best practices. Thus, the goal of this study is to provide accessible strategies to improve school climate. However, according to Meyer (2007), "strategies that work" are deceiving because of differences in educational environments, making an ecological approach to educational reform a necessity. Further, many regions may still experience resistance to LGBTQIQA-affirmative school counseling practices and policies. Therefore, implementation of these strategies requires thoughtful application and adaptation to meet the needs of each educational community. These results are to be employed with discretion and in congruence with professional competencies of a systematic, data-driven, comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2012).

Study Limitations
An expert panel is integral to the Delphi method; however, research utilizing purposive sampling is restricted by lack of generalizability of nonprobability sampling. This study also had limitations because of sample size and homogeneity. Although 10-15 experts are sufficient for homogenous samples (Ziglio, 1996), the total sample for this study (N = 14) is considered small. The final sample was 100% White, which may have limited variance in perspectives and results. Another limitation of this sample was the predominant number of counselor educators in comparison to practicing school counselors. The author made every

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 NEEDS OF EACH EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY.

The results of this study may be applied in action research models to determine whether or not the integration of these strategies affects climate. Outcome research is essential for policy reform and an expectation of accountable, data-driven school counseling programs. Therefore, systematic application of these strategies is an integral aspect of future research directions to determine whether or not this framework is a mechanism for change. The results also may be integrated into school counselor education curricula to determine whether the inclusion of expert recommendations for deconstructing heteronormative policies and practices causes higher levels of competence for school counselors in training.

CONCLUSION

This study identified practical ways school counselors can deconstruct educational heteronormativity to foster inclusive institutional reform. For the field to embrace a social justice paradigm, school counselors and counselor educators must begin a critical and informed discourse to disrupt dominant narratives and oppressive regulatory practices. To view educational environments through a lens of critical inquiry is a way school counselors can identify and address barriers that inhibit equal access to high quality public education. This study was intended to illuminate the voices of school counselors as educational leaders and social justice advocates that contribute to inclusive educational environments. These results are envisioned to transform critical theory into critically conscious school counseling practices that allow for difference to be embraced and celebrated in safe, affirming educational environments. ■

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