School Based Policies Protecting LGBTQ+ Youth

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ABSTRACT

SCHOOL BASED POLICIES PROTECTING LGBTQ+ YOUTH

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Dissertation supervised by Dr. Tammy L. Hughes, Ph.D., ABPP

According to the 2017 National School Climate Survey, over half of all LGBTQ+ students reported experiencing LGBTQ+ related discriminatory policies or practices in their schools (GLSEN, 2019). While there is legislation in place that should standardize compliance and equality within school districts, there is often a discrepancy in implementation and follow through in public school systems. This study sought to examine a) school psychologists’ knowledge of federal legislations protecting LGBTQ+ youth, b) school psychologists’ self-report of the implementation of these regulations in their school’s policies, and c) the attitudes of school psychologists working with LGBTQ+ youth. Results indicated that attitude does impact the overall skills utilized in schools by clinicians across the country. Furthermore, grade levels of students serviced have a significant interaction with the amount of knowledge possessed by practitioners.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The United States education system is, some have argued, one that is committed to the development of the whole child (Noddings, 2005). Federal and state education policies regulate how schools are to promote children’s academic, behavioral, and emotional/social growth. While school systems have historically developed programming to be responsive to the aforementioned areas of children’s development, healthy identity development has yet to receive the same degree of attention. Identity development consists of two key processes: exploration, trying out different roles and options, and commitment, which involves committing to one’s identity (Marcia, 1966). Within both phases, individuals work to discern how they will express themselves and their individual identity. This is of particular importance for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ+) students where individual identity expressions are prohibited by some districts. For example, Diaz, Kosciw, and Greytag (2010) document prohibitions on such activities as forming or otherwise financially supporting Gender-Sexuality Alliance clubs, restricting same-sex couples from participating in school dances or other extracurricular activities where pairings suggest dating or intimacy. In addition, requiring gender-specific sports teams that are comprised of athletes only as indicated by their biological sex assigned at birth, and regulatory use of bathrooms as representing common hostile and unwelcoming situations for LGBTQ+ youth in schools. Since it is known that the years spanning middle and high school are a time of critical importance in identity development (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005), it becomes important to determine the extent to which the lack of support for LGBTQ+ youth can be counterproductive and/or interfere with a child’s development. One of the ways to address this is to examine where and how current federal and state regulations already protect children’s identity development and which policies and procedures are incongruent with productive identity expressions.
Child Development in Schools

The education system within the United States is arguably one of the safest places for children to develop (Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen & Pollitt, 2013). In a more obvious sense, the education system has been dedicated to the academic development of students for as long schools have been in existence. In more recent years, schools have become more focused on not only helping to develop children academically, but also behaviorally and socially. Indeed, many may argue that the education system in the United States is an institution that is committed to the development of the whole child. Federal and state education policies regulate how academic, behavioral, and emotional/social growth in children are managed in schools, but identity development has yet to receive the same level of attention.

Indubitably, consensus appears to be lacking in regard to the need for schools’ involvement in students’ development in the domains of personality and identity (Eliason & Schope, 2007). The trajectory of child development is such that academic, behavioral, social, and identity development are all occurring simultaneously, rather than hierarchically. Although all of these forms of development are occurring in a parallel fashion, each has different levels of supports built into the U.S. education system. Identity development is essential to the growth of children, as it impacts the establishment of self-esteem, self-concept and self-evaluation (Harter, 1990). Identity formation affects the lives of adolescents drastically, and impacts their overall functioning, including performance in schools. By overlooking this crucial part of child development, schools are depriving children of the holistic supports they need in order to thrive. There is a need for educators in American schools to better understand and gain familiarity with the process of identity development, in order for the development of the whole child to be better supported in schools.
Relevant Literature

LGBTQ+ Students in Schools

Because of the documented difficulties experienced by LGBTQ+ youth, there is a need for policies in the American school systems that offer protections and provide positive school climate for these students. “Comprehensive anti-harassment policies that include protections for transgender and gender diverse students are helpful for all students” (Case & Meier, 2014, p. 74). Written policies and procedures addressing the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender diverse students are helpful for staff and administrators, and all students and families (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network/National Center for Transgender Equity, 2011; Massachusetts DOES, 2012).

Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN): 2017 National School Climate Survey. A 2017 study, conducted by GLSEN, sought to identify the national climate of schools in the United States. The National School Climate Survey is one of the few studies in which the authors examine the school experiences of LGBTQ+ students in America. The results have been monumental in understanding the issues that LGBTQ+ students face, and in informing practices and policy-making nationwide. The 2017 version of this study included a sample of 23,001 students, ranging in age from 13-21, who were from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 5 US territories (GLSEN, 2019).

Overall, the study indicated that schools are distressing and hostile environments for LGBTQ+ youth. The majority of students polled reported that they routinely experience discrimination and victimization and hear anti-LGBT language at school. Such experiences have resulted in LGBT youth being less involved in school activities, or missing school entirely (GLSEN, 2019).
Federal Laws and Regulations. There are several key legislative documents that speak to the level of federal support LGBTQ+ students have in schools, as well as other public settings in the United States. These are: The First Amendment of the United States Constitution, the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution, also known as The Equal Protection Clause, Title IX of the Education Amendments, The Equal Access Act, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Together, these documents outline that LGBTQ+ students have the freedom to express themselves in the gender they choose (First Amendment), have equal protections from harassment and discriminations as their gender-conforming peers (14th amendment), and have the right to school resources for extra-curricular activities and events, just like all other students in their schools (The Equal Access Act). Although there are laws identifying these civil rights, there is still an overall lack of implementation of these regulations in school-based policies at the state and local levels.

Guiding Documents from National Psychological Organizations. As the leading professional organizations for school psychologists, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the American Psychological Association (APA) are committed to advancing practices in the field that help to increase the academic, behavioral, social and emotional functioning of all students. “NASP’s vision is that all children and youth thrive in school, at home, and throughout life” (NASP, 2014, p. 1). Similarly, APA supports the holistic development of children both in and out of school settings (APA 2013). In accordance with these commitments and vision, both NASP (2011; 2014) and APA (2012; 2013) have issued guiding documents regarding best practices in school settings with LGBTQ+ students.

Consultative Practices

Another key role of school psychologists is to gather information, through consultative practices, that will help to create an effect of change for policies and practices. “Achieving this
goal requires setting short-term priorities and making changes in day-to-day practices as well as school policies” (Nastasi & Varjas, 2013, p.44). By starting with short-term and day-to-day practices, school psychologists are working from the ground up. First, individuals are trained to implement the new practices, which then funnel to the student body, and ideally become accepted as the new normal in the school. This feeds into the idea of an organizational consultation practice, where the goal is to work beyond just the students or educators, and rather create a system of change. During the implementation of practices, and creation of new school policies, the school psychologists or another team member should work to collect meaningful data about the changes being made. This data can help to evaluate the effectiveness of what is being implemented and will contribute to future decision-making and policies that may be created.

**Theoretical Basis**

**Developmental Theories**

**Erikson.** The process of identity development and formation begins at a young age. Identity development includes the development of personality, gender, and sexuality (Fleming, 2004). Children begin experiencing and exploring their identity in relation to the world during infancy and continue to develop their identity as they age. This can be explained through Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development. In Erikson’s theory, a series of eight developmental stages are identified, which children progress from infancy to late adulthood (Erikson, 1982). The two phases that have the most impact upon sexual identity development are stages five and six in Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development. Stage five is *Identity versus Role Confusion*, which occurs during adolescence. In this stage, not only are adolescents experiencing puberty and sexual organ maturation, but also, they are balancing new expectations in their social and academic lives as they transition into secondary school. During this period,
adolescents work to separate themselves from their parents, and to assume an identity of their own. For some students, this comes easily (Erikson, 1982). Others have to learn to define and invent themselves; they try out new identities with clothes, activities, and in some cases drug experimentation or sexual behavior (Fleming, 2004).

In stage six, *Intimacy versus Isolation*, adolescents are learning to develop intimacy and closeness with another individual. During this phase, some young adults may have a higher level of maturity and independence, which enables them to develop intimacy more seamlessly. For others who struggled to develop in previous stages, developing intimacy may be more complex, and they may lean toward isolation, and the avoidance of intimate relationships (Fleming, 2004).

**Stages of fluid sexual identity development.** Carrion and Lock (1997) further outline stages of sexual identity development, which closely relates to the work of Erikson. The stages are as follows. Stage 1 is the *internal discovery of the sexual orientation*. This stage includes feelings of confusion about identity, shame related to fears of rejection or abandonment, and minimization, such as ignoring sexual feelings and denial of sexual exploration and internal conflicts.

Stage 2 is described as an *inner exploration of attraction to sexual objects*. In this stage, the individual begins to further explore the feelings he or she experienced in stage 1, but still is internalizing such feelings.

Stage 3 is when the individual experiences *early acceptance of an integrated sexual self*. It is during this stage that the individual begins to experience congruence between his or her being, identity, and sexual orientation.

Stage 4, known as *congruence probing*, is when the individual goes through ways of testing his or her sexual identity. It is during this phase that he or she often realizes that there are others in society who are also homosexual.
Stage 5, *further acceptance of an integrated sexual self*, is the beginning of the externalization process of sexual identity. It is during this stage that the individual begins to come out to others; this stage only can occur after the individual has discovered his or her sexual identity and worked through it internally.

Stage 6, *self-esteem consolidation*, is when the social perceptions of homosexuality are compared against the internal views of self. This stage is often when the individual is sorting through his or her own views of the self, and establishing self-esteem and self-worth related to his or her new identity.

Stage 7 is the *mature formation of an integrated self-identity*. It is during this stage that the individual further accepts his or her identity and forms pride in the feelings of self. This stage commonly occurs during early adulthood (i.e., early to mid 20’s) and is not commonly seen in a middle school or high school setting.

Finally, in Stage 8, *integrated self-identity within a social context*, the individual is mutually enriched in society, meaning his or her identity is further mutually supported and also positively affecting society (Mosher, 2001). The occurrence of this stage is dependent upon when the individual reaches Stage 7, which can vary by person. However, it is common to see individuals reaching mature formation of self-identity in their twenties or thirties.

The inclusion and integration of identity development into mental health services in the education system is crucial. Much like social and behavioral development, identity and sexual development can affect a child’s ability to learn in the educational setting, especially if he or she is faced with adverse situations, such as bullying or discrimination. To date, there are federal laws, such as amendments in the constitution and anti-harassment regulations, which protect students with diverse sexual or gender identities. However, these regulations are often overlooked, and are not recognized in the education system. The exclusion of these policies and
practices in school systems means that these students are not being equally protected in a way that their heterosexual and gender-conforming peers are protected by basic school policies. School-based policies, on both a state and national level, need to be revisited and revised in order to better meet the developmental needs of gender-diverse students, which will be further discussed in the next section of this paper.

**Conceptual Framework**

A key part of the conceptual framework for this study is the utilization of a needs assessment. Per the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2017) a needs assessment can serve many purposes, including identifying strengths and weaknesses in current school practices, as well as analyzing data in order to identify the gap between these practices and desired conditions. Instead of looking at the needs of a particular school or district, the needs assessment concepts will be applied to analyze and address common concerns regarding inclusivity policies and curriculum for LGBTQ students in schools across the country.

In addition, the implementation science literature will inform any recommendations for improvements by data explaining the gaps. In this literature, implementation refers to “the process of putting a practice or program in place in the functioning of an organization, such as a school, and can be viewed as the set of activities designed to accomplish this” (Forman, Shapiro, Codding, Gonzales, Reddy, Rosenfield, & Stoiber, 2013, p. 80). Implementation science practices concern activities on an organizational level that stimulate actions for change.

Underlying these frameworks is the acknowledgement that inherent to discovering the gaps between current practices and desired conditions, is the need to consider the how policies are related to student experiences. For example, the structural approach to policy analysis, as it applies to schools, deals with examining educational policies (e.g., federal and school-based legislation) and its focus on the effects of school structures (e.g., curriculum or classroom
practices) and ultimately student outcomes (Heck, 2004). Also, institutional theory for educational policy analysis explains how organizations (i.e., schools), “adopt structures not so much for the purpose of maximizing their efficiency in attaining goals, but rather, for the purpose of aligning with their external environments” (Heck, 2004, p. 150). In this case, how schools’ comprehensive policies are decided upon is at times contingent upon social and environmental pressures, rather than legal requirements. However, the first step toward understanding the student experience is being able to identify the gaps via the needs assessment.

**Problem Statement and Research Questions**

Accordingly, in the following study, after a review of: a) the developmental theories that promote comprehensive child development, including successful identity development, and b) federal and state regulations that protect identity expressions, this author will develop a survey in order to determine which practices school systems and personnel are using to support the wellbeing of LGBTQ students. The research questions will be organized in the following manner:

1. What percentage of a national sample of school psychologists are aware of current federal legislations already protecting LGBTQ+ youth? (Knowledge)
   
   a. Federal legislations relevant to protecting LGBTQ+ youth:
      
      i. First Amendment of the United States Constitution
      
      ii. 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution (The Equal Protection Clause)
      
      iii. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972
      
      iv. The Equal Access Act
      
      v. The Family and Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
2. What percentage of this national sample of school psychologists is implementing current federal legislations and already protecting LGBTQ+ youth in their practices? (Knowledge)

3. What percent of a national sample of school psychologists reported comprehensive school policies in their districts (i.e., protections for both gender and sexuality expression)? Do these findings mirror national data from student self-reports (i.e. GLSEN, 2019)?

4. What percent of the national sample of school psychologists reflect an attitude towards increasing inclusion and a welcoming school climate for LGBTQ+ youth?

5. Are there significant statistical relationships between the knowledge of federal policies, the capability and skills to implement said policies in schools, and overall practitioner attitude towards LGBTQ+ youth?

   Hypothesis 1: higher levels of reported knowledge and reported skills will correlate positively with overall position attitudes towards LGBTQ+ youth.

6. Does the knowledge of practitioners vary depending upon the primary age and grade level of students serviced?

   Hypothesis 2: Practitioners working with high school students will have higher levels of reported knowledge and skills than elementary and middle school-based practitioners.
Chapter Two: School-Based Policies Protecting LGBTQ+ Youth

Child Development in Schools

The education system is arguably one of the safest places for children to thrive. In a more obvious sense, schools have been dedicated to the academic development of students for as long they have been in existence. In more recent years, schools have become more focused on not only helping children to develop children academically, but also helping them to thrive behaviorally and socially.

Indeed, many may argue that the education system in the United States is an institution that is committed to the development of the whole child (Noddings, 2005). Federal and state education policies regulate how academic, behavioral, and emotional/social growth in children are managed in schools, but identity development has yet to receive the same level of attention. For example, regulations such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act (20 U.S. Code § 6301) ensures that all students achieve academically in schools and are not left in a failing school system or environment. Models such as Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS) are in place to help identify students who are struggling either academically or behaviorally and are used as a way to gain supports for students early in the special education identification process.

There is one specific area of development that has proven to be particularly challenging for the education system to handle: identity development. Consensus appears to be lacking in regard to the need for schools’ involvement in students’ development in their personality and identity. The trajectory of child development is such that academic, behavioral, social, and identity development are all occurring simultaneously, rather than hierarchically. However, although all of these forms of development are occurring in a parallel fashion, each has different levels of supports built into the education system. There is a need for the U.S. education system
to better understand and gain familiarity with the process of identity development, in order for the development of the whole child to be better supported in schools.

**Developmental Processes**

**Erikson.** The process of identity development and formation begins at a young age. Identity development includes the development of personality, gender, and sexuality (Fleming, 2004). Children begin experiencing and exploring their identity in relation to the world during infancy and continue to develop their identity as they age. This can be explained through Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development. Erikson’s theory identifies a series of eight developmental stages, through which children progress through from infancy to late adulthood (Erikson, 1982).

The first stage of Erikson’s theory, *Basic Trust versus Basic Mistrust*, depends on social interactions with mothers (or perhaps, primary caregivers), in which children’s expectations for nurturing relationships are developed (Erikson, 1982). Erikson acknowledges that children will not develop appropriately if their basic developmental needs are neglected or if they are overindulged (Fleming, 2004). A prime example of the learning task within this phase is when a child is able to accept his or her mother’s absence without having anxiety. The second stage, *Autonomy versus Shame and Self Doubt*, can primarily be described as a period when toddlers gain a sense of control of their bodily functions and motor skills. During this stage, it is common for children to want to do things on their own, but in reality, they still need their parents’ assistance on some tasks (Fleming, 2004).

Stage three, *Initiative versus Guilt*, deals with children who are becoming active and mobile, and are learning to experiment and play. During this stage, children develop the ability to independently complete basic tasks. The ideal balance between initiative and guilt occurs when the child develops a conscience feeling of competition with his or her parents (Fleming,
This balance occurs through gradual independent task completion. The fourth stage, *Industry versus Inferiority*, is when children develop competencies of mainly learning and mastering skills that are needed to succeed in later life. This stage commonly occurs during elementary school.

The two phases that have the most impact on sexual identity development are stages five and six in Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development. Stage five is *Identity versus Role Confusion*, which occurs during adolescence. Not only are adolescents experiencing puberty and sexual organ maturation, but also, they are balancing new expectations in their social and academic lives as they transition into middle school. During this period, adolescents work to separate themselves from their parents, and to assume an identity of their own (Erikson, 1982). For some students, this comes easily. Others have to learn to define and invent themselves; they try out new identities with clothes, activities, and in some cases drug experimentation or sexual behavior (Fleming, 2004). During this phase, it is important for parents and children to have mutual respect and appreciation for one another.

Stage six, *Intimacy versus Isolation*, deals with the development of intimacy and closeness with another individual. During this phase, some young adults may have a higher level of maturity and independence, which enables them to develop intimacy more seamlessly. For others who struggled to develop in previous stages, developing intimacy may be more complex, and they may lean towards isolation, and the avoidance of intimate relationships (Fleming, 2004).

Stage seven, *Generativity versus Stagnation*, and stage eight, *Integrity versus Despair*, do not address childhood, but rather middle to late adulthood. These stages primarily deal with assimilation into society, childbearing, careers, and productivity. Stages seven and eight are post-identity development and are more so reliant on how one identifies and assimilates into the
society in which he or she lives. However, arguments have been made that not all individuals experience every stage of Erikson’s theory. The context of one’s ego identity, personal, and social identity as well as his or her self-concept may prevent him or her from experiencing the multidimensionality and extensity of Erikson’s stages (Schwartz, 2001).

**Carrion and Lock.** In more recent years, theories explaining the fluidity of sexual identity have become more prevalent. Carrion and Lock (1997) published an eight-phase, universal and dynamic model, which moves from early stages of internal discoveries, to struggles through self-disclosure, and eventually to integration into relationships and society. Carrion and Lock identify that fluid sexual identity formation continues to develop throughout one’s life.

*Stages of fluid sexual identity development.* Stage 1 is the internal discovery of the sexual orientation. This stage includes feelings of confusion about identity, shame related to fears of rejection or abandonment, and minimization, such as ignoring sexual feelings and denial of sexual exploration and internal conflicts.

Stage 2 is described as an inner exploration of attraction to sexual objects. In this stage, the individual begins to further explore the feelings he or she experienced in stage 1, but still is internalizing such feelings.

Stage 3 is when the individual experiences early acceptance of an integrated sexual self. It is during this stage that the individual begins to experience congruence between their being, their identity, and their sexual orientation.

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Stage 6, *self-esteem consolidation*, is when the social perceptions of homosexuality are compared against the internal views of self. This stage is often when the individual is sorting through his or her own views of the self, and establishing self-esteem and self-worth related to his or her new identity.

Stage 7 is the *mature formation of an integrated self-identity*. It is during this stage that the individual further accepts his or her identity and forms pride in the feelings of who he or she is. This stage commonly occurs in young adulthood, or the early twenties of an individual’s life. This stage is when individuals begin to form secure opinions and values.

Finally, in Stage 8, *integrated self-identity within a social context*, the individual is mutually enriched in society, meaning his or her identity is further mutually supported and also positively affecting society (Mosher, 2001). This stage, which many people meet in mid adulthood, focuses on reciprocity within society, where citizens contribute to the community that they live in, and also benefit from the community.

The inclusion and integration of identity development into mental health services in the education system is crucial. Much like social and behavioral development, identity and sexual development can affect a child’s ability to learn in the educational setting, especially if he or she is faced with adverse situations, such as bullying or discrimination. To date, there are federal laws, such as amendments in the Constitution, and anti-harassment regulations that protect students with diverse sexual or gender identities. However, these regulations are often overlooked, and are not recognized in the education system. The exclusion of these policies and
practices in the school system means that these students are not being equally protected in a way that their heterosexual and gender-conforming peers are protected by basic school policies. School-based policies, on both a state and national level, need to be revisited and revised in order to better meet the developmental needs of gender diverse students, which will be further discussed in the next section of this paper, in the American school systems.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning: Historical and Social Development

In the United States, only 3.8% of the population identifies as LGBT (Gates, 2016). However, the LGBT population is diverse, and includes many different definitions and identities regarding gender and sexual diversity, including those that are questioning. In recent years, this population has gained more attention and support nationally, which has been lacking for decades. Currently, it is estimated that there are 9 million individuals in the United States that identify as LGBT (Gates, 2011). As the population continues to grow, awareness and acceptance of individuals who are sexually and gender diverse needs to grow, as well.

Terminology

The following are definitions that outline key terminology essential to politically correct language in both policy and education: (NASP, 2010).

- **Asserted gender**: The gender a person declares to be, verbally, nonverbally, covertly, or overtly. A transgender person's gender is usually affirmed insistently, consistently, and persistently over years.
- **Cisgender**: A person whose sex assigned at birth matches current gender identity. The opposite of transgender. “Non-Transgender” is sometimes used but implies that being transgender is not a normal variant of human difference.
- **Gender**: The psychological, behavioral, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female (VandenBos, 2007). Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors,
activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for boys and men or for girls and women (APA, 2011).

- **Gender Assignment:** The classification of an infant at birth as either male or female (VandenBos, 2007); this assignment of a legal gender (sex) to a child triggers a variety of social events and developmental tasks related to gender role.

- **Gender Constancy.** A child's emerging sense of the permanence of being a boy or a girl (VandenBos, 2007), an understanding that occurs in stages but is mostly complete by age 7. School entry presents greater pressure to conform to gender expectations. At this age, some children with a gender identity incongruent with their birth-assigned sex may experience distress if they are not permitted to express and be witnessed as their gender. At clinically significant levels, this is called “gender dysphoria” (VandenBos, 2007).

- **Gender dysphoria.** Discontent with the physical or social aspects of one's own sex (VandenBos, 2007). The degree of distress can vary from mild to severe, and can be life long, although not all transgender people experience gender dysphoria. The child with gender dysphoria may demonstrate symptoms of depression, anxiety, self-harm, or oppositional behaviors (APA, 2013).

- **Gender diverse.** Someone is considered gender diverse if his or her gender expression does not match what is culturally expected for the sex assigned at birth (Gender Equity Resource Center, n.d.). Individuals may dress or act in ways that others believe are not feminine enough or not masculine enough. Gender diverse implies that all humans express gender, and that no gender expression is inherently better than another. Gender diverse is an alternative term for gender fluid, which implies that gender diverse people are violating rules for gender expression; it is also an alternative for gender variant, which implies difference from a norm.
Being gender diverse means having an unexpected gender expression, meaning expression different than the stereotypical male and female expressions. However, being transgender means having an unexpected gender identity. Some transgender people do not appear gender diverse and not all people who are gender diverse are transgender.

- **Gender expression.** This refers to how a person represents or expresses gender identity to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice, or body characteristics (NCTE, May 2009). Gender expression is visible and outwardly expressed, while gender identity is not. Some people with diverse gender expression are happy with their sex assigned at birth and have no desire or intention to transition genders.

- **Gender identity.** A person's internal sense of being male, female, both, or neither (APA 2011). This sense of maleness or femaleness typically develops from a combination of biological and psychic influences (VandenBos, 2007). Shortly after children begin to speak, most are able to state whether they are a boy or a girl, and this identity is stable and resistant to change. Gender identity typically forms between 2 and 5 years of age. For most people, gender identity is consistent with sex assigned at birth.

- **Genderqueer.** A person who defies or does not accept stereotypical gender roles and may choose to live outside expected gender norms may self-identify as genderqueer. (Center for Excellence in Transgender Health, April 2011). Genderqueer people may or may not choose to participate in hormonal or surgical treatments as a means to living outside of their expected gender norms.

- **Sex.** The term “sex” refers to a person's biological characteristics, including chromosomes, hormones, and anatomy (VandenBos, 2007).

- **Sexual Orientation.** It is important to note that a person's gender identity is distinctly unique from sexual orientation. Sexual orientation refers to a pattern of emotional,
romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, both sexes, transgender people, no one, or all genders (APA, 2008; VandenBos, 2007). A transgender adult may be attracted to women, to men, to both women and men (bisexual), to no one (asexual), and/or to other transgender people. One's sexual orientation identity label is usually derived from gender identity, and not birth assigned sex. For example, a female to male transgender man who is primarily attracted to other men is likely to self-identify as gay. A male to female transgender woman who is primarily attracted to men is likely to identify as straight. Transgender people are more likely to also identify as LGB than cisgender people.

- **Transgender.** This refers to having a gender identity that differs from culturally determined gender roles and biological sex (VandenBos, 2007). It is an umbrella term that includes diverse identities and includes persons identifying as female-to-male, male-to-female, two-spirit, genderqueer, and other terms (APA, 2011).

The transgender umbrella includes those assigned female at birth who are or who wish to be living as men (*transgender men*), and those assigned male at birth who are or who wish to be living as women (*transgender women*). Many transgender people appear indistinguishable from cisgender people. They may or may not desire body modifications to express their asserted gender. Body modifications may be temporary (e.g., shaving, changing hair style, binding, using hormone blockers) or permanent (e.g., hormones, electrolysis, surgeries; APA, 2011). Medical assistance can help transgender people live more comfortably, as it usually helps them to blend in as their affirmed gender. Transgender women typically identify as *women*, and transgender men typically identify as *men*. 
In transgender people, there is a distinct difference between birth-assigned gender and affirmed gender, which is important to note and recognize when working with this population. In cisgender people, affirmed gender aligns with birth-assigned gender.

- **Transition.** The process of changing gender expression from that of one gender to another is called *transition* (APA, 2011). There are two different forms of transitioning, which usually are sequential in nature.
  - **Social transition.** Includes changes in clothing, grooming, pronouns, names, and identity documents. Children, adolescents, and adults may undergo social transition at any time. However, this typically occurs prior to medical transition.
  - **Medical transition.** Includes hormones and surgeries. Surgeries are only available after age 18, after at least one year of living persistently and consistently as the desired gender. Youth who have lived persistently in their preferred gender and who have reached Tanner Stage 2 for their birth sex (around age 12 for female-born youth and about 14 for male-born youth) may be eligible for medication that can suppress puberty until they reach age 16 or older when they may be eligible to be treated with hormones appropriate to their desired gender, saving much of the expense, pain, and cost of medical transition for adults (APA 2011).

**Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)**

There was a shift in diagnoses when the most recent version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V) was published. In the DSM-V, the available diagnosis is “Gender Dysphoria”, which is defined as “people whose gender at birth is contrary to the one they identify with” (DSM-V, 2013). This is a revision from the previous version, the DSM-IV, which offered the diagnosis of gender identity disorder. Gender Dysphoria is “intended to better characterize the experiences of affected children, adolescents, and adults”
(DSM-V). A guiding reason behind the change in terminology was the need for a term that protected access to care, while simultaneously removing stigmas by utilizing more appropriate words. Replacing the term “disorder” with “dysphoria” is more appropriate and consistent with other terminology, and also removes the connotation that the client is disordered as result of their identity.

A diagnosis of gender dysphoria, per the DSM-V requires:

1) A notable conflict between their gender identity or expression and the gender they were assigned at birth that persists for at least six months.

2) Measurable impairment or distress in routine functions, such as social or professional, as a result of the condition.

For a child, a diagnosis of gender dysphoria requires a manifestation of six out of eight criteria, among which, “insistence they are not the gender assigned at birth, a strong dislike of their own sexual anatomy; and a strong desire for clothes, toys, or activities typically associated with another gender”. A gender dysphoria diagnosis in adolescents requires meeting two of six criteria. It is important to note that not all individuals who are gender diverse have the possible diagnosis of gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria must relate specifically to distress in social and or professional functioning. Many individuals are able to transition without distress, but for those who have difficulties with transitions; a diagnosis may help them to receive more appropriate services.

**LGBTQ+ in Schools**

There is a need for policies in the American school systems that offer protections and provide positive school climate experiences for LGBTQ+ youth. “Comprehensive anti-harassment policies that include protections for transgender and gender diverse students are helpful for all students” (Case & Meier, 2014). Written policies and procedures addressing the needs of
transgender and gender diverse students are helpful for staff and administrators, and all students and families (e.g. Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network/ National Center for Transgender Equity, 2011; Massachusetts DOES, 2012).

**Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN): 2017 National School Climate Survey**

A 2017 study, conducted by GLSEN, sought to identify the national climate of schools in the United States. The National School Climate Survey is one of the few studies that looks at school experiences of LGBTQ+ students in America. Its results have been monumental in understanding the issues LGBTQ+ students face, and in informing practices and policy-making nationwide. This study included a sample of 23,001 students, ranging in age from 13-21, who were from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 5 U.S. territories (GLSEN, 2019).

Overall, the study indicated that schools are distressing and hostile environments for LGBTQ+ youth. The majority of students polled reported that they routinely experience discrimination, victimization, and hear anti-LGBTQ+ language at school. These results have led to LGBTQ+ youth being less involved in school activities or missing school entirely. Specifically, 34.8% of LGBTQ+ students missed at least one entire day of school in the past month due to feeling unsafe (GLSEN, 2019).

Additionally, there was a breakdown of the percentage of students who experienced harassment in schools based on the region in which they live. 95.3% of LGBTQ+ students stated that they heard “gay” used in a negative way, and 91.8% of these students indicated that this language made them feel distressed within their school environment. Furthermore, 56.6% of the sample identified hearing negative remarks specifically from their teachers or other school staff (GLSEN 2019). The findings show that significantly more LGBTQ+ students experience verbal harassment in schools, than physical harassment or physical assault. When looking at this data
from the National School Climate Survey, it is important to keep in mind that these numbers are only the students who chose to report the harassment and victimization they are experiencing. In reality, the numbers could be greater than they are represented in this study.

The 2017 National School Climate Survey also looked at discriminatory school policies and practices specifically. Some notable findings from the study are as follows (GLSEN, 2019):

- 31.3% of students reported being disciplined for public displays of affection that non-LGBTQ+ students did not receive discipline for
- 11.7% of students reported being unable to attend a school function (i.e. dance) with another student of the same gender
- 18.2% of students were prohibited from discussing or writing about LGBTQ+ issues in school assignments
- 42.1% of transgender students were prevented from using their preferred name
- 43.6% of transgender students had been required to use a bathroom or locker room of their legal sex (GLSEN, 2019).

Additionally, although 79.3% of students reported that their schools have anti-bullying policies, only 12.6% of these students indicated that the policies were comprehensive. “Comprehensive” for the sake of this study meant that the anti-bullying policies included both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Students in these schools reported lower levels of homophobic remarks as well as higher levels of staff intervention when a homophobic remark was made (GLSEN, 2019).

Another outstanding statistic is that 36.3% of students had not participated in the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) at their respective schools (GLSEN, 2019). Countless studies have shown that students who feel safe and affirmed in their schools have more positive outcomes.
LGBT students who receive school-based LGBTQ+ resources, such as a GSA, report overall better experiences at school. However, according to the climate survey, only 54% of students reported that their schools have GSAs. Findings indicated that youth who were involved with GSAs were less likely to hear negative or homophobic remarks and were more likely to report to school personnel when facing discriminatory behaviors from peers (GLSEN, 2019, p. xxi).

The National Climate Survey presents staggering statistics regarding the current status of school climates in the United States. This data indicates there is a great need for schools to be more welcoming of sexual and gender diversity. Research shows that students in negative and hostile school climates are at an increased risk for mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, as well as lower academic achievement. However, this is not being equally considered for LGBTQ+ youth, and in turn, the majority of this population is struggling in their school systems.

**History of Federal Laws and Regulations**

**First Amendment of the United States Constitution**

The first ten amendments of the United States Constitution, also referred to as *The Bill of Rights*, were put into effect on December 15, 1791. The First Amendment states that, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble…” (U.S. Cost, Amend. I).

An important Supreme Court case related to First Amendment rights is *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969). This case came to fruition after a middle school teacher and a group of her students chose to wear black armbands to school, in order to show their disagreement with the war in Vietnam. The school board asked the students and teacher to remove the bands; when they did not, they were sent home, and told they could not return to school until they agreed to
remove the bands. The decision of this case was in favor of the plaintiff and found that students should not “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate” (39 U.S. 503, 1969). This case showed that the First Amendment applies to practices in public schools. School officials cannot censor student speech and expression unless it disrupts the educational process.

Per the First Amendment, in regard to the LGBTQ+ population, students “have the right to be ‘out’, to voice their opinion about LGBTQ+ issues, and to organize peaceful protests. They also have a right to take a same-sex date to the prom and dress and express themselves in a way that best matches their gender identity” (GLSEN, 2013). School districts that limit these expressions, or enact district policies that violate these student protections, deprive students of their basic civil rights.

14th Amendment of the United States Constitution (The Equal Protection Clause)

The 14th Amendment of the Constitution also referred to as The Equal Protection Clause, states that “No state shall…deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws” (U.S. Cost, amend XIV, § 1). Under this amendment, equal protection is guaranteed to all citizens, and is effective in public schools. With this being said, all students have a federal and constitutional right to equal protection. This means that schools have a responsibility to protect LGBTQ+ students from harassment and discrimination, on the same basis as all other students.

A notable court case related to the 14th amendment is Nabozny vs. Podlesny (1996). Jamie Nabozny’s school in Ashland, Wisconsin was found to have failed in keeping him safe from anti-gay bullying and harassment. Jamie had approached his school administrators on numerous occasions during middle school and high school asking for protection from harassment and bullying. Despite school policies addressing student-on-student battery and sexual
harassment, Jamie’s concerns were never addressed. The case found the school district failed to protect his constitutional rights and awarded him $900,000 in damages (DeSimone, 1997).

**Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972**

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, or “Title IX” (20 U.S.C. §1681), is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs and activities. All public and private elementary and secondary schools, school districts, colleges, and universities that receive any type of federal funds are required to comply with Title IX. Under Title IX, discrimination on the basis of sex can include sexual harassment or sexual violence, such as rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, and sexual coercion. (Wright & Wright, 2007).

In the school setting, there is a responsibility to respond to reports of sexual harassment. If a school knows about sexual harassment or sexual violence that creates a hostile environment, the school must take immediate action to eliminate the sexual harassment or sexual violence, prevent its recurrence, and address the concerns. In the case that a student or his parents do not want a complaint filed, the school should still investigate any allegations of sexual harassment or violence in order to appropriately resolve the situations. If there is a complaint filed through law enforcement, it’s important to be aware that a criminal complaint does not relieve the school of its duty under Title IX to resolve complaints promptly and appropriately.

Every school must have a Title IX coordinator, who is responsible for overseeing the school’s compliance with Title IX. Schools must notify all students and employees of the name or title and contact information of the Title IX coordinator. The coordinator’s responsibilities include overseeing all complaints of sex discrimination and identifying and addressing any patterns or systemic problems that arise during the review of such complaints. (U.S. DOE, 2010). In addition, all schools need to have a policy against sexual discrimination under Title IX.
Schools are required to publish the policy stating that the district does not discriminate on the basis of sex in education or related programming (i.e. sports and extracurricular activities). This notice should be made available to the public on an ongoing basis. The policy must state that inquiries concerning Title IX may be referred to the school’s Title IX coordinator, or to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR).

Title IX should apply to the LGBTQ+ population in the same way that it applies to any other population in schools. There should be policies in place that prevent sexual discrimination, and they should be inclusive of the LGBTQ+ population. Additionally, LGBTQ+ students should know the protocol and procedures within their school for filing a complaint if they feel that they have been discriminated against based on their sexual or gender identity.

**The Equal Access Act**

The Equal Access Act (1984) (20 U.S.C. §§ 4071-74) specifically applies to secondary schools and extracurricular activities at the schools. This federal law ensures that students have access to school meeting spaces and resources for non-curriculum clubs. It states that “it shall be unlawful for any public secondary school which receives Federal financial assistance and which has a limited open forum to deny equal access or a fair opportunity to, or discriminate against, any students who wish to conduct a meeting within that limited open forum on the basis of the religious, political, philosophical, or other content of the speech at such meetings” (20 U.S.C. §§ 4071-74).

If a school allows any extra-curricular activities to form, it has to allow for the formation of a GSA. Additionally, a school may not impose special rules or restrictions on the GSA that are not imposed on other clubs (U.S. DOE, 2010). Formation of clubs on campuses should include those that are specific to the LGBTQ+ population, such as GSAs or ally clubs. This is just one element of the equality and inclusivity that should be in schools for the LGBTQ+
population. Students should also be allowed to participate in school activities without their gender and sexuality coming into play.

**The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**

FERPA (1974) is a federal law that is managed by the Family Policy Compliance Office in the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. DOE). FERPA applies to all educational agencies and institutions, such as schools, that receive funding under any program administered by the Department. Parochial and private schools at the elementary and secondary levels generally do not receive such funding and are therefore they are not subject to FERPA compliance. Private postsecondary schools, however, generally do receive such funding and are subject to FERPA. “FERPA deals with educational records, privacy and confidentiality, parent access to educational records, parent amendment of records, and destruction of records” (Wright & Wright, 2012). This statute is in place in order to protect the privacy of parents and students.

FERPA prohibits improper disclosure of personal information that is gained from access to education records. Thus, information that an official obtained through personal knowledge or observation, or has heard orally from others, is not protected under FERPA. This remains applicable even if education records exist which contain that information, unless the official had an official role in making a determination that generated a protected education record.

Confidential and personally identifiable information includes but is not limited to:

a) The student’s name;

b) The name of the student’s parent or other family member;

c) The address of the student or student’s family;

d) A personal identifier, such as the student’s social security number or student number;
e) A list of personal characteristics that would make the student’s identity easily traceable; or

f) Other information that would make the student’s identity easily traceable

(Wright & Wright, 2012)

Under FERPA, a school is not generally required to maintain particular education records or education records that contain specific information. Rather, a school is required to provide certain privacy protections for those education records that it does maintain. Also, unless there is a request by an eligible student to inspect and review education records, FERPA permits the school to destroy such records without notice to the student (Coopenhaver, 2002). FERPA broadly addresses the concept of confidentiality and protecting the rights of LGBTQ students in schools.

**Student Non-Discrimination Act**

The Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA) (2015) (S.439/ H.R. 846) was proposed as a way to protect individuals from discrimination based on their gender and sexual identity on a federal level. This was the first bill of its type to be proposed, and a major step in the direction of equality, as the discrepancies in protections were being acknowledged. There are countless federal statutes that offer protections for individuals in our country. “Federal statutory protections address discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, and disability” (S.439/ H.R. 846). Unfortunately, federal civil rights laws do not explicitly state protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Decades of civil rights history show that civil rights laws are effective in decreasing discrimination because they provide strong federal remedies targeted to specific vulnerable groups” (H.R. 846, 2015). This evidences the need for SNDA or a similar law to be enacted as a support for LGBTQ+ rights.
SNDA would prohibit public schools from discriminating against any student based on their perceived or actual gender identity. The bill would allow for a targeted individual to seek judicial proceedings after a violation. SNDA was modeled after Title IX. It was introduced as a bill into the House of Representatives on February 10, 2015. On July 9, 2015, SNDA was offered as an amendment to Every Student Achieves Act. Unfortunately, SNDA did not receive enough votes to proceed.

Although SNDA was not passed, Numerous organizations support the bill, including the American Association of University Women, American Federation of Teachers, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), the American Psychological Association (APA), the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Council of La Raza, the National Education Association, and the National Women’s Law Center. (H.R.846, 2015).

**Obergefell v. Hodges**

In a 2015 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, the majority held that marriage is a fundamental right, and is thus protected for all individuals, including those who are LGBTQ+. This decision effectively struck down the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) (Pub.L. 104–199, 110 Stat. 2419), ruling that discrimination against LGBTQ+ Americans in issuing marriage licenses was unconstitutional. This right is protected through the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment (576 U.S., 2015). The decision made by the Supreme Court shows that homosexuality and gender diversity is a normal expression of human sexuality, and should be respected as such (APA, 2015). By supporting marriage equality on a national level, the U.S. Supreme Court acknowledged the need for adjustments by state leaders in their policy and decision making. This landmark case could be the turning point for future LGBTQ+ rights
issues the United States. If the 14th Amendment and Equal Protection Clause are being used as support for equal rights in the context of marriage, there is equal support for the use of these constitutional protections for LGBTQ+ Americans in other areas of federal policy, including federal education policies.

**State Laws and Regulations**

The Movement Advancement Project (2016) has a goal to identify gaps in legal equality within the United States. Specifically, this project aims to breakdown laws and policies by state, and the expose the discrepancies in state-based policies protecting LGBT individuals in America. The following are policy maps that reflect key areas of LGBT education policy and current regulations by state. The maps visually display how school-based protections for Americans vary by state, based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. It is important to consider while there are many states without any laws protecting the LGBT population, there are other states that still have policies in place that actively discriminate against LGBT students and deprive them of their basic human rights.

**Anti-Bullying Laws and Statewide Regulations**

Across the country, there are varying level of anti-bullying laws and policies currently being implemented to protect LGBT students. As of 2015, 19 states and the District of Columbia, had laws that prohibit bullying on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity. About 51% of the LGBTQ+ population, are currently living in these states. Utah, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Georgia are states that have laws that prohibit bullying only on the basis of sexual orientation. This indicates that there are not policies in place in these states, which protect gender fluid, or gender expressive individuals. Although it seems that a significant chunk of the United States is working towards establishing policies to protect the LGBTQ+
population in schools, there is still a significant amount of room for growth. 24 states have no laws in place to protect this population (Movement Advancement Project, 2016).

**School Non-Discrimination Laws and Statewide Regulations**

In addition, there are 12 states and the District of Columbia that have state laws which prohibit discrimination in schools based on sexual orientation or sexual identity. These states account for roughly 36% of the total LGBTQ+ population in the United States. Utah, New Mexico, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania have laws that prevent discrimination of students in schools based on solely sexual orientation. The remainder of the states (33 in total) do not have any laws in place that protect LGBTQ+ youth. These 33 states are home to about 60% of the LGBTQ+ student population (Movement Advancement Project, 2016). This indicates that 60% of America’s LGBTQ+ students are going to schools where they are not protected by their state from discriminative practices, although there are federal laws that say otherwise (Movement Advancement Project, 2016)

**Anti-LGBT School Laws by State**

At this time, there are still states, Arizona, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and South Carolina that have “Don’t Say Gay” regulations. These regulations are written to prevent discussion of same-sex relationships in schools. Often times these regulations are vague and applied in ways that inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth is limited in other parts of curriculum, extracurricular, and school events (Movement Advancement Project, 2016). These states prevent teachers, school administration and staff from discussing important LGBTQ+ issues that may arise. South Dakota and Missouri are the only two states with regulations that prohibit specifying anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies in relation to LGBTQ+ youth. The remaining 40 states and the District of Columbia do not have any anti-LGBTQ+ school laws and regulation. 81% of the LGBTQ+ student population live in these states (Movement Advancement Project, 2016).
As previously explained by the maps above, most of these states do not have anti-harassment and anti-bullying laws. Although there are not laws preventing LGBTQ+ discussion, there also are not laws that are protecting LGBTQ+ students.

**Guiding Documents from National Psychological Organizations**

As leading professional organizations for school psychologists, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the American Psychological Association (APA) are committed to advancing practices in the field that help to increase the academic, behavioral, social and emotional functioning of all students. “NASPs vision is that all children and youth thrive in school, at home, and throughout life” (NASP, 2014). In accordance with these commitments and visions, both APA and NASP have issued guiding documents regarding best practices in school settings with LGBTQ+ students.

**APA and NASP: Resolution on Gender and Sexual Orientation Diversity in Children and Adolescents in Schools**

APA and NASP issued a combined statement titled, *Resolution on Gender and Sexual Orientation Diversity in Children and Adolescents in Schools* in 2015 (APA and NASP, 2015). This joint resolution recommends that school administrators create a safer school environment that is welcoming to all gender diverse students. This includes access to activities and programs based on their gender identity, as well as bathrooms, locker rooms, teams and classroom activities. Additionally, gender segregation should be eliminated, especially in regard to uniforms, school dances and extracurricular activities. “School psychologists should encourage schools to develop and implement policies and procedures to prevent harassment of gender diverse and transgender students in order to promote safe schools for all students” (APA and NASP, 2015).
NASP: Safe-Schools for Transgender and Gender Diverse Students

Additionally, NASP issued a position statement titled Safe-Schools for Transgender and Gender Diverse Students (NASP, 2014). Children spend a considerable amount of their time in school settings, yet schools are not considered a safe space for transitioning and transgender youth. Data from the GLSEN 2013 National School Climate Survey indicates that 74.1% of LGBTQ+ students have been harassed in their schools, and 56.7% of said students did not report incidents to school staff (Kosciw, Greytag, Palmer & Boesen, 2013). “Many children, youth, and adults blend with their chosen gender, and are safe to the extent that their transgender status is hidden. Data concerning school-age transgender youth are limited, but what data are available suggest that more action by school officials is needed to ensure schools are settings in which students can thrive” (NASP, 2014). Children in the transitioning process are often victimized for their self-expression, which in turn leads to higher levels of depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions. There is a need for schools to better accommodate and protect transgender students in the educational setting.

NASP and Gender Spectrum: Gender Inclusive Schools: Policy, Law and Practice

According to NASP and Gender Spectrum, “A gender inclusive school also makes the diversity of gender visible in the books, hallway displays and everyday conversation” (Westheimer, Cannava, & Klotz, 2016). As previous research and studies have shown, students who are gender diverse are at an increased risk for harassment by both adults and peers in the school systems (GLSEN, 2013). This document was issued as a catalyst to creating changes in the schools. However, it is well known that change takes time.

Some states, like Massachusetts, have offered guidance documents that are applicable to all districts and schools within it. NASP acknowledges that the example Massachusetts has set in establishing policies regarding student privacy and rights in the schools is one that other states
should follow as a way to better support equality. Additionally, NASP outlines how school professionals should handle instituting gender inclusive practices. First, the stakeholders should assess the school climate. Then, they should assess how creating a gender inclusive school matches the school’s current initiatives, and how it differs. Then, school administrators should hold professional development sessions, and propose other strategies for transitioning to a more gender inclusive school (Westheimer, Cannava, and Klotz, 2016).

**Educational Policy Analysis**

The approach for this study will need to consider the relevant structural and theoretical steps in policy analysis (Heck, 2004). The structural processes in policy analysis, includes an examination of the policy (i.e., what do the policies say) and how do those policies affect students (i.e., what are the outcomes). The theoretical underpinnings used in policy analysis consider how policies are selected and which policies are contingent upon social, political and environmental pressures, rather than reliance on ethical and legal knowledge. A needs assessment, which is a systematic process of collecting and analyzing data in order to identify and define a need or the problem to be addressed (Crothers, Hughes, & Morine, 2008), will be employed. In addition, processes described in the implementation science literature - which include questions that focus on identifying the gap between the current practice and the desired practice (Forman, Shapiro, Codding, Gonzales, Reddy, Rosenfield, & Stoiber, 2013) will be utilized when structuring the survey instrument.

**School Professionals’ Knowledge of Federal Policies and Best Practices**

School psychologists and school administrators are key stakeholders in the process of developing and implementing gender inclusive policies in schools. “To work most effectively with LGBTQ students, school psychologists need to be aware of developmental issues; students’ experiences of bullying and harassment in the schools; within group differences; and ethical, professional,
and legal obligations” (Fisher, 2015). The knowledge that these school professionals have on the LGBTQ+ population is essential in order to work to create change and an inclusive environment for students, along with developing policies. Beyond that, there needs to be the correct balance of consultation and assessment of the needs of the individual school districts, and knowledge of conflict resolution processes.

**Best Practices in Supporting Students who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning**

School psychologists have ethical and professional obligations to respect the rights and dignity of all students, including those who identify as LGBTQ+. Practitioners should ensure they participate in professional development focused on LGBTQ+ issues to ensure they are competent to address the needs of LGBTQ+ youth. “This means that school psychologists who lack knowledge about LGBTQ+ issues, or feel unprepared to work with LGBTQ+ students, or have personal beliefs that have an impact on their ability to provide affirmative services for LGBTQ+ students must seek information, training, supervision, and counseling rather than simply referring LGBTQ+ students to other practitioners” (as cited in Fisher, 2015). An important element to developing this competency is reflecting on one’s own sexual orientation, gender identity and the developmental sequence they moved through.

NASP’s position is that school psychologists must ensure that LGBTQ+ have equal opportunities to benefit from both the educational and mental health services offered in schools. “School psychologists can do this by modeling ethical practices, ensuring their visibility as a resource for LGBTQ+ students, providing trainings for school staff on LGBTQ+ issues, addressing discriminatory practices, providing appropriate counseling services, and advocating for LGBTQ+ students (as cited in Fisher, 2015). It is recommended that teachers, administrators and mental health professionals gain training in LGBTQ+ issues, particularly prior to
implementation of gender inclusive policies and practices. Research has shown that training for school personnel across disciplines, including school psychologists, regarding LGBTQ+ issues is lacking in preparation programs, indicating the need for professional development sessions offered by schools (Fisher, 2015).

There is also a need for inclusive curriculums, where LGBTQ+ issues are integrated into conversation and learning in classrooms in the same way that issues for their heterosexual peers are addressed. “School psychologists can help teachers integrate LGBTQ+ topics into curriculum so that all students feel valued and validated” (Fisher, 2015). Beyond that, GSAs should be present at schools, along with access to community agencies that work with LGBTQ+ youth. “This connection can help normalize students’ experiences and create a sense of belonging and hope” (Fisher, 2015). Some resources that should be accessible to students are doctors who are sensitive to LGBTQ+ health issues and homeless shelters that welcome LGBTQ+ youth.

**Pre-Candidacy Training**

A study by Whitman (2013) indicates that preparatory programs are lacking in training regarding LGBTQ+ issues. This suggests a need for additional professional development and exposure to trainings on this topic in the field. There are three key areas that training should focus on: knowledge, awareness, and skills. In terms of knowledge, school personnel need to gain understanding of language and terminology regarding the LGBTQ+ population. Additionally, knowledge about sexual and gender identity development needs to be established, as well as how this affects experiences in schools and academic outcomes for LGBTQ+ students (Whitman, 2013).

School psychologists should also be prepared and willing to offer counseling services for LGBTQ+ youth, for a variety of reasons. Presenting reasons could be issues related to sexual orientation or gender identity, or issues unrelated to their identity. Some common areas of
emphasis in LGBTQ+ counseling are supporting the process of identity development and coming out. For students who are struggling with their identity, there may be a need to address suicidal ideations. The Suicide Prevention Resource Center has estimated that between 30-40% of LGBT youth have attempted suicide at some point (SPRC, 2015). Risk factors such as victimization at school, and lack of family connectedness could lead to an increased suicide risk and may need to be handled accordingly in the therapeutic relationship (Fisher, 2015).

Overall, school psychologists must work to be allies and advocates for LGBTQ+ students in schools. This can start by making efforts to use inclusive language and can lead to larger steps such as conducting professional development series related to LGBTQ+ issues. Once practitioners find their voice in advocating for LGBTQ+ issues, students will feel empowered and find their own voices to handle the injustices of this situation in schools today (Fisher, 2015).

**Consultative Role**

According to Crothers, Hughes and Morine (2008), organizational and systems consultation (OSC) can be valuable in working with LGBTQ+ families and youth. “OSC can be used to create environments that are friendly to LGBTQ+ families, children, and adolescents, including involving all parties that hold power within a system, identifying resistance to systemic changes, following an agenda to create a welcoming school atmosphere for all, developing functional patterns of communication and disseminating information within schools” (Crothers, Hughes & Morine, 2008). OSC can also help to facilitate the creation of programs, which encourage education for school professionals, parents, and students about LGBTQ+ topics, or can help to advocate for families. In addition, the use of organizational or systems consultation can help to recognize lack of competency or lack of experience in working with LGBTQ+ families and identify information regarding appropriate reactions and responses to LGBTQ+ issues. For consultation to be most effective, some believe that consultants should utilize a
systems perspective in order to evaluate all layers of the school’s environment. This approach allows the school psychologist, or team to look beyond individuals, and instead focus on a holistic conceptualization (Crothers, Hughes, & Morine, 2008).

Another key role of school psychologists’ is to gather information that will help to create an effect of change for policies and practices. “Achieving this goal requires setting short-term priorities and making changes in day-to-day practices as well as school policies” (Nastasi & Varjas, 2013). By starting with short-term and day-to-day practices, school psychologists are working from the ground up. First, individuals are trained to implement the new practices, which then funnels to the student body, and ideally becomes accepted as the new normal in the school. This feeds into the idea of an organizational consultation practice, where the goal is to work beyond just the students or educators, and rather create a system of change. During the implementation of practices, and creation of new school policies, the school psychologists or another team member should work to collect meaningful data about the changes being made. This data can help to evaluate the effectiveness of what is being implemented and will contribute to future decision-making and policies that may be created.

Previous studies show that there is an overall lack of support for consultation and intervention in schools for LGBTQ+ youth. McCabe & Rubinson (2008) found in a study of graduate students that majority would have little or no support from school staff to intervene in situations of LGBTQ+ harassment. Additionally, there was a diffusion of responsibility among individuals surveyed, meaning the responsibility of the psychologist in intervening in situations relating to LGBTQ+ youth was uncertain. Overall, this study indicated that students and early career school psychologists do not feel adequately prepared to work and intervene with the LGBTQ+ population in schools. Another study by Curry (2009) supported the need for school-based supports for LGBTQ+ youth, specifically in the realm of counseling and consultation.
Curry found that by not addressing demonstrations of homophobia in the schools, students in the LGBTQ+ population became isolated and estranged from receiving mental health services in schools (2009, p. 8). It is the responsibility of school counselors and psychologists to establish an understanding that such practices are not inclusive and are damaging to the academic and emotional success of students in the school.

In conclusion, school psychologists have a unique skillset and ability to work as key stakeholders in establishing and encouraging proper policies and implementation in school districts nationwide. The utilization of organizational and systems level consultation, paired with professional development sessions and the integration of psychotherapeutic techniques can help bridge the discrepancy to create gender-inclusive schools, and move towards equality for all students, regardless of their gender or sexual identity.
Chapter Three: Methods

This study will utilize a cross-sectional survey design in order to identify school psychologists’ knowledge of the current educational policies protecting LGBTQ+ youth, their preparedness for working with this population in skills, and their dispositions towards inclusive practices. A power analysis will be conducted to identify the sample size. Ideally, a large enough sample size will be collected so that the type I and type II error can be decreased with $\beta = 0.80$. From there, the alpha level ($\alpha = 0.05$), number of groups and effect sizes, which will be based upon a moderate value, will also be calculated.

Participants

Study participants were school psychology practitioners in the U.S. Participants were gained from a national mailing ($n=1000$) through NASP. Participants’ contact information was obtained through In Focus, a list management service that maintains the NASP membership database. In Focus randomly selects 1,000 school psychology practitioners from across the country and provides their contact information. In addition, practitioners were contacted through state school psychology associations. Individual state associations that agreed to participate in the study distributed the survey link to members either via listserv emails, or through a posting on their independent websites. A total of 17 state school psychology associations participated in distribution of the survey at hand. The estimated reach via state associations was 3,500 individuals.

Accessing Participants. Data collection occurred through Qualtrics, a website that allows surveys to be administered. Survey links were mailed to participants via postcards, which included a QR code for access to the survey. Postcards were distributed through the U.S. mail. Respondents were from a predesignated sample, described above. NASP supported data collection efforts by allowing the researcher to access contact information of NASP practitioners.
after formal (University IRB & NASP) approval. Mailings included a 2-sided post card, which gave a brief overview of the study at hand and included a QR code and survey link to access said study. Upon accessing the survey via Qualtrics, participants were prompted with a brief introductory letter that described the research and asked the participants to consent to completing the survey. Consent was gained if participants choose to complete the survey questionnaire on Qualtrics.

**Research Design**

The current survey research methodology will provide the ability to generalize about a population by drawing inferences based on data from a small portion of a population (Rea & Parker, 2014). Beyond that, surveys offer an opportunity to reveal characteristics of communities by studying individuals and how they represent their communities in an unbiased and rigorous way. Surveys should generate standardized data that is able to be quantified from a small portion of a population. In order to do so, procedures will be followed regarding how surveys will be distributed, how data is obtained and collected, and how analyses will be completed (Rea & Parker, 2014).

**Measures**

A self-designed survey was utilized to collect data from participants included in the sample. Survey design employed best practices in creating effective questionnaires (e.g., closed-ended questions followed by opportunities to provide additional information, concise language, and brief format). The self-designed survey was developed to reflect general trends regarding school psychologist's: a) basic knowledge of federal legislation requirements, b) the capabilities of school psychologists, including skills they need to consult and advocate for carrying out federal practices in their home district school policies and c) school psychologists’ attitudes towards the needs of LGBTQ+ student needs in the district.
The author sought consultation from experts in the field regarding the construction of the survey instrument, in order to ensure that critical pieces of the LGBTQ+ field are included. Experts in both technical as well as substantive expertise were included in survey consultation. At present, the author is serving on the NASP special interest committee (LGBTQI2-S) along with several leaders in school psychology. The author gained expert consultation from three members of the board who agreed to contribute their knowledge to the current project. Experts contributed their knowledge in a content validity ratio per question analysis, as shown through ratings of items included on the survey. Content validity is determined by experts indicating whether an item is “not necessary, useful but not essential, or essential” (Zamanzadeh, Ghahramanian, Rassouli, Abbaszadeh, Alavi-Majd, & Nikanfar, 2015). The ratio is then calculated based upon the number of panelists indicating essential, divided by the total number of panelists \[ CVR = \frac{(N_e - N/2)}{(N/2)} \]. If the number calculated is higher than 0.3, then the content item is significant and is acceptable to be included in the survey; if not item needs to be re-evaluated and addressed or removed from the instrument (Zamanzadeh et. al., 2015). A Content Validity was then established based upon statistical significances found in item. The expert panel was utilized to confirm that the content in the survey is congruent with the current LGBTQ+ research base. The content validity index works to increase the probability that the questions sample valid observations from the participants included.

**Survey Design.** The questionnaire began with a general statement, which outlined the objectives and goals of the study. The sample selection will be identified as practicing school psychologists, and there will be clarity regarding the motivation behind the survey. The survey began with introductory questions, which elicited straightforward and factual information about the participant. Demographic information will be gathered from this section. This section also included screening questions, which will prevent participants from continuing to complete the
survey if they do not meet qualifying criterion. For example, participants that are graduate students were not allowed to continue to complete the questionnaire after initial demographic questions were answered. From there, questions that addressed sensitive issues, in this case LGBTQ+ inclusion in schools, were asked. Questions were presented in a multiple-choice format. Some of the multiple-choice questions included the selection of “other”, which then prompted a response box that allowed the participant to fill in another answer which was not listed in the response choices. This survey had three distinct parts; the first part focused on the individual’s knowledge of federal legislations supporting LGBTQ+ youth; the second gathered data from psychologists regarding their self-report of skills they have to implement these legislations in their school districts; and the third part concentrated on the individual’s attitudes and feelings about moving towards comprehensive policies and inclusive school-climate practices in schools.

The survey was designed in Qualtrics, an established research software that functions through the internet. Qualtrics is a collaborative platform that allows for survey design and dissemination. The platform allows researchers to design and implement surveys, as well as the option to perform statistical testing through the software. This platform was chosen due to the reputable nature of Qualtrics, and insurance of participant confidentiality, which helps to meet criterion of the IRB.

Postcards with attached links and QR codes for the questionnaire were mailed to individuals that are in the initial sample provided from NASP. Postal service mailings were utilized as a result of requirements from NASP. Six weeks after the first mailing date, follow-up postcards were mailed to participants in order to elicit the maximum amount of participation from the sample provided. The expected return rate for survey data collection is 30% of the sample size, or in this case roughly 300 participants (Rea & Parker, 2014).
Data Analysis

After the data were collected, they were cleaned. This included omission of cases that do not meet criterion for participation in the survey at hand. Examples of inaccurate or incomplete records may be non-practicing school psychologists and graduate students. Additionally, test of assumptions, such as measures of normality, homogeneity, linearity, and variance, were employed to determine the fit of the variables. The homogeneity of variance assumption was tested in order to show that the population had equal variance. Additionally, the distribution within the population surveyed was checked for normality and there was assurance that each variable was independently sampled, meaning each variable only provides one value. If any of the assumptions listed above are violated, statistical analyses performed may be misleading. Statistical analyses for this study included a multiple regression, which enabled the researcher to predict the value of disposition based on the variables of knowledge and implementation. A multiple regression determined the overall variance of the model, as well as the contribution of each independent variable (knowledge and implementation) to the dependent variable of attitude, as seen through attitude and awareness, of school psychologists.

In addition, effect coding was employed as a way to find the impact that categorical variables have on another variable in order to answer research question number 6. The implementation of effect coding allows a researcher to reflect conditions that a participant belongs to, meaning that the participant can either belong to a category, or does not belong, and is coded accordingly. “A major reason for creating classifications is to study how they relate to, or help to explain, other variables” (Pedhazur, 1997, p. 340). This will be generated through coded vectors, which is done through the equation \((k-1)\). \(k\) represents the total number of groups, which is three; therefore, two vectors will be generated. Elementary, middle school, and high school teachers, will be coded as either a zero, one, or negative one to represent which condition
of teaching the participants belong to. In the first vector, elementary school teachers will be identified as a group and coded as one, then all other subjects will be assigned zeros (middle school teachers), and the last group (high school teachers) will be assigned the code of negative one. In this case, the effect coding will allow the researcher to examine how a practitioner’s primary grades serviced impact their level of knowledge and implementation reported towards LGBTQ+ youth. By utilizing effect coding, information about the effects of membership in groups on the variability of implementation can be found through a regression analysis. Thus, the categorical variable (primary grades serviced) will be regressed to identify if grades serviced impacts the level of implementation of LGBTQ+ services provided. All statistical analyses and coding will be conducted through SPSS.

Research Questions

Accordingly, in the following study, the author sought to specifically answer the following questions based on self-reports from school psychologists. Analyses for each research question are documented below.

7. What percentage of a national sample of school psychologists are aware of current federal legislations already protecting LGBTQ+ youth? (Knowledge)
   a. Federal legislations relevant to protecting LGBTQ+ youth:
      i. First Amendment of the United States Constitution
      ii. 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution (The Equal Protection Clause)
      iii. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972
      iv. The Equal Access Act
      v. The Family and Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
8. What percentage of this national sample of school psychologists is implementing current federal legislations and already protecting LGBTQ+ youth in their practices? (Knowledge)

9. What percent of a national sample of school psychologists reported comprehensive school policies in their districts (i.e., protections for both gender and sexuality expression)? Do these findings mirror national data from student self-reports (i.e. GLSEN, 2019)?

10. What percent of the national sample of school psychologists reflect an attitude towards increasing inclusion and a welcoming school climate for LGBTQ+ youth?

11. Are there significant statistical relationships between the knowledge of federal policies, the capability and skills to implement said policies in schools, and overall practitioner attitude towards LGBTQ+ youth?

   Hypothesis 1: higher levels of reported knowledge and reported skills will correlate positively with overall position attitudes towards LGBTQ+ youth.

12. Does the knowledge of practitioners vary depending upon the primary age and grade level of students serviced?

   Hypothesis 2: Practitioners working with high school students will have higher levels of reported knowledge and skills than elementary and middle school-based practitioners.

The above research questions were analyzed using the following statistical analyses.

1. Research question one was answered using frequency calculations. Each federal legislation had a separate percentage calculated to find the total number of
participants in the sample that are knowledgeable about that particular legislative document.

2. Research question two was answered using frequency calculations. A percentage was utilized to find the amount of the sample that is implementing protections for LGBTQ+ youth in their practices.

3. Research question three was answered using a calculation of frequencies in order to find the representation of comprehensive school policies in the self-reports from the school psychologists sampled.

4. Research question four was answered using a calculation of frequency. The percentage identified the amount of the sample that reflects a positive awareness/attitude towards increasing inclusion and a welcoming school climate for LGBTQ+ youth.

5. Research question five was answered utilizing a multiple regression equation. Utilization of a multiple regression enable the researcher to predict the value of attitude based on the variables of knowledge and skills. The multiple regression will determine the overall variance of the model, as well as the contribution of each independent variable (knowledge and skills) to the dependent variable of attitude of school psychologists.

6. Research question 6 was answered utilizing effect coding and a multiple regression equation. Effect coding is a way to create categorical predictor variables to utilize in a regression.
Chapter 4: Results

Construction of combined variables and constructs utilized for analyses are presented. Descriptive statistics are then presented on the demographic characteristics of the sample population. Analyses were then conducted to test the hypotheses and analyze the relationship among knowledge, skills, and attitudes of school psychologists towards LGBTQ+ students across the United States.

Development of Constructs

Three transformed variables were created based on combined responses within the survey. Constructs of Knowledge, Skills, and Attitude were created in order to best analyze data for research questions five and six. Development of each are discussed as follows.

Questions that were collapsed into the Knowledge variable were regarding legislations. Specifically, respondents selected the correct answer for:

1. “The First Amendment of the Constitution covers students in which of the following ways?”
2. “The Equal Access Act of the Fourteenth Amendment”
3. “The Fourteenth Amendment applies to students in which of the following ways”
4. “What is the primary purpose of the Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972
5. “The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) handles which of the following?”

Questions included in the overall Attitude variable were ranked on a Likert scale (1-5). However, for the purpose of statistical calculations, responses indicated as “Undecided” were eliminated. Therefore, the finalized range on the Likert scale at hand was a 1-4. Questions that contributed to this construct variable of Attitude are as follows:
1. “It is acceptable for schools to restrict participation in extracurricular activities based on the biological sex of the student (i.e. male tennis team or female dance club)”

2. “Same sex dates are acceptable to prom”

3. “It is acceptable to provide meeting space for the chess club and decline the Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) meeting space”

4. “It is acceptable to allow gender diverse students to use bathrooms consistent with their gender identity”

5. “A student is entitled to gender and sexuality self-expression in public schools”

6. “Transgender students are allowed to use their names and pronouns in school even if these are in disagreement with names on legal documents (i.e., birth certificates, social security cards)”.

Three questions collapsed into the combined construct of Skills for Research Questions Five and Six. The following questions were the ones identified for use within the Skills construct because they were reliant on practitioner report of their own practices, rather than practices that are represented within their school buildings.

1. If your school district has inclusive policies (i.e., anti-bullying and non-discrimination) in place for LGBTQ+ youth, were you involved in the creation of these policies?

2. Have you provided professional development to staff members (i.e., teachers, paraprofessionals, social workers) on sexual and gender identity development in schools?

3. Do you currently provide mental health services (i.e. therapy/support groups) for LGBTQ+ youth?
Table 1 reflects the maximum and minimum ranges of each of the constructs presented. Questions for Knowledge were coded as a 0 for incorrect and 1 for correct, meaning that if respondents got all 5 questions correct, they would have a score of 5 for the Knowledge construct. Similarly, for Skills, responses were coded as 0 if a skill was present and 1 if a skill was not present. For attitude, respondents received a score ranging from 1-4, as previously described, based on a Likert scale.

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.133</td>
<td>0.834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.419</td>
<td>.859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12.314</td>
<td>1.675</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha Based on Standardized Items</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>.470</td>
<td>.463</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>.317</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Internal consistency and reliability was calculated for each of the three constructs that were included as part of this research question. Calculation of Cronbach’s Alpha was utilized as a way to measure the consistency and overall reliability between questions contributing to each of the three hypothesized constructs. It should be noted that internal consistency and reliability
and consistency of questions at hand are a limitation of the study. A Cronbach’s alpha less than 0.7 is deemed as one that is less than acceptable per social science research. Reliability data is as shown above in Table 2.

**Descriptive Analyses**

Table 3 shows participants’ demographic information by group membership. In all, 308 school psychologists (35 male, 265 female, 4 gender variant, 2 other, and 2 non-specified) participated in the study. While the sample used for statistics included 308 practicing psychologists. It should be noted that 113 graduate students were eliminated from the study due to their current engagement in studies. The estimated reach of the study was 4,500 individuals. With that being said, the response rate for this study was 6.8%. In addition, the margin of error for all percentages presented below is +/- 5.5% based upon the sample size at hand.

Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Demographic Characteristics (n=308)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Variant*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to specify</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-35 years</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45 years</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-59 years</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+ years</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Gender variant is relating to a person whose gender identity or gender expression does not conform to socially defined male or female gender norms. **Margin of error= +/- 5.5%
Of those sampled, ages ranged from 20-60+, as identified in Table 3. While there was an uneven distribution in genders and age, this was expected given the overall make-up of the field of school psychology.

Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s + Level</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PsyD</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in Practice</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16+ years</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Margin of error= +/- 5.5%

Table 4 demonstrates the education levels and number of years in practice for the sample. This data is reflective of the national sample of school psychologists, as the field of school psychology has grown tremendously within the past decade (Walcott & Hyson, 2018). Another perspective that this data supports is attrition after five years in practice, which is common in the field of education (Billingsley, 2004). Per NASP, 55% of practicing school psychologists in the United States are working with a specialist degree or certificate of advanced education, while 25% of practicing school psychologists hold a doctoral degree (Walcott & Hyson, 2018). With
this being said, the data included in this sample is wholly reflective of practicing psychologists across the country.

**Knowledge of Federal Legislation—Research Question One.** A series of frequency calculations were used to identify the percentage of participants within the sample that responded with the correct answers on the five questions that loaded into the *Knowledge* variable. Table 5 identifies the responses gained for each of the questions that contribute to the variable of Knowledge, which research question one addressed.

Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge of Federal Legislations (n=308)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>N correct</th>
<th>% correct *</th>
<th>N incorrect</th>
<th>% incorrect *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Amendment</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>98.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Access Act</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourteenth Amendment</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>140</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title IX</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FERPA</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>90.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Margin of error= +/-.5.5%

**Implementation of Protections—Research Question Two.** Table 6 illustrates findings regarding the number of practitioners that are implementing protections for LGBTQ+ youth. Findings were found using frequency data for identified variables. This data represents what rights LGBTQ+ youth are afforded in the schools in which the sample practice. There are also included questions that specifically targeted practitioner implementation of skills.
Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation of Protections for LGBTQ+ Youth (n=308)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred Names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress to Represent Gender Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSA Formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Services for LGBTQ+ Youth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Margin of error = +/- 5.5%

Selected questions within this table contributes to the combined variable of Skills, which is used in future analyses. While the questions above in Table 6 indicate implementation and general practices within schools, the three questions collapsed into the Skills variable specifically measure if practitioners are involved in practices, rather than if their districts allow LGBTQ+ youth certain rights.

**Inclusive School-Based Policies—Research Question Three.** Table 7 represents the sample and the number of practitioners in schools that utilize inclusive LGBTQ+ policies. Data was found using frequency analyses for the question: “Does the school district you work for have
inclusive policies (i.e., anti-bullying and nondiscrimination) specifically in place for LGBTQ+ youth?"

Much like research question 2, a substantial amount of the sample identified that they are unaware of the current policies that their schools have in place, which could suggest that practitioners have a lack of involvement and awareness within policy making at their school or district level.

Table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N=Yes</th>
<th>%= Yes*</th>
<th>N= No</th>
<th>%= No *</th>
<th>N= Unsure</th>
<th>%= Unsure*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Margin of error = +/- 5.5%

Positive Attitudes Towards an Inclusive School Climate—Research Question Four.

Research question four, as represented in Table 8, identifies the amount of the sample that reflects a positive attitude towards increasing inclusion and a welcoming school climate for LGBTQ+ youth. Respondents answered each question on a five-point Likert scale. However, responses of undecided were eliminated, and the scale was then converted to a 4-point scale.
Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude Towards Positive School Climate for LGBTQ+ Youth (n=308)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total (represented by %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restriction of Extracurriculars due to Biological Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.4%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.6%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Sex Dates are Acceptable for Prom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73.4%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.4%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Providing Meeting Space for GSA but for Other Clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.5%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73.4%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathroom Use Consistent with Gender Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.3%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.8%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are Entitled to Gender and Sexuality Self-Expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58.8%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.4%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Preferred Pronouns and Names for Transgender Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58.8%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.5%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant responses are indicated with **
*Margin of error= +/- 5.5%

Reflection of Attitudes of Practicing School Psychologists as seen through their Self-Reported Knowledge and Skills—Research Question Five. Correlation and multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between the amount of skill and knowledge of school psychologists and the overall positive attitudes of school psychologists towards LGBTQ+ youth. The narrowed sample for this question was n=103, due to elimination of respondents to answered with “undecided” answers on attitude questions, as well as elimination of practitioners who did not indicate utilization of skills in their practices. The assumptions of linearity, multivariate normality, no multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were evaluated (Mertler & Vannata). The residuals are approximately normally distributed. There is no pattern in the scatter, meaning that the assumption of homoscedasticity was tenable. The scatterplot showed that there was a strong positive relationship between the variables, indicating
linearity. Therefore, all assumptions are tenable. Table 9 summarizes the descriptive statistics and analysis results. As can be seen in Tables 9 and 10, skill is significantly correlated with attitude.

Table 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary Statistics, Correlations and Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant items are indicated with **

Table 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses (N= 103)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded Variable in Stepwise Procedure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant items are indicated with **

The multiple regression model (Table 10) with two variables produced the results as follows. The Stepwise method of regression was utilized for these analyses. Stepwise is a method for regressing multiple variables while removing variables that are the least correlated. The product of a stepwise regression is the variables that best explain the distribution. Regression showed that there was not a significant relationship between knowledge, skills, and attitude. However, there was a significant interaction between overall skills and attitude of practitioners (R²=.195, R² Change=.038, F (1. 3.980), p=.049). The hypothesis for this research question was
as follows: “higher levels of reported knowledge and reported skills will correlate positively with overall position attitudes towards LGBTQ+ youth.” The data indicated that the null hypothesis is accepted due to there being insignificant correlations between knowledge and skills.

**Impact of Grade Levels Serviced on Overall Knowledge—Research Question Six.**

Correlation and multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the interactions between grade levels serviced in schools and the overall knowledge that school psychologists possessed regarding serving LGBTQ+ youth. The assumptions of linearity, multivariate normality, no multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were evaluated (Mertler & Vannata). The residuals are approximately normally distributed. There is no pattern in the scatter, meaning that the assumption of homoscedasticity was tenable. The scatterplot showed that there was a strong positive relationship between the variables, indicating linearity. Multicollinearity was not indicated (VIF=1 for all variables). Therefore, all assumptions are tenable. Univariate and multivariate outliers were tested and accounted for within this sample. Multivariate outliers were kept within the data for these analyses because removal of outliers did not impact the findings. Cases were retained because participants with higher Mahalanobis scores seemed to have an understandable and reasonable range of response. Correlation results, seen in Table 11, show that none of the grade level groups are significantly correlated with knowledge.
Table 1.

*Summary Statistics, Correlations and Results (N=308)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Correlation with Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.434</td>
<td>-.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.268</td>
<td>.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.318</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary, Middle School</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.363</td>
<td>-.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary, High School</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.241</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle, High School</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>-.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary, Middle, High School</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.409</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.

*Summary of Main Effects of Multiple Regression Analyses (N= 308)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>-.050</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>-.436</td>
<td>.663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>.205</td>
<td>.182</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>1.128</td>
<td>.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.155</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.923</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Summary of Interactions of Regression Analyses (N=308)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary, Middle School</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td>-.016</td>
<td>-.271</td>
<td>.787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary, High School</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.202</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td>.934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle, High School</td>
<td>-.475</td>
<td>.348</td>
<td>-.079</td>
<td>-1.365</td>
<td>.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary, Middle, High School</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.230</td>
<td>.818</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, Data in Table 12 indicates that there are not significant interactions between grade levels serviced and the knowledge of practitioners within this sample ($R^2 = .111$, $R^2$ Change$= .012$, $F (7, 300)$, $p=.805$). It should be noted that all grade levels serviced did not have positive correlations with knowledge within the sample. Therefore, the null hypothesis is
accepted because the hypothesis of “practitioners working with high school students will have higher levels of reported knowledge and skills than elementary and middle school-based practitioners” does not stand true given the data shown in Table 12. Due to the high level of overall knowledge reported within the sample at hand, it is understandable that the model is rejected due to the low amounts of overall variance.
Chapter Five: Discussion

This discussion will focus on interpreting the findings of the current study and drawing related conclusions. The results will be interpreted as they relate to the research questions and hypotheses, and the exploratory analyses will be reviewed. Limitations of this study will be discussed, followed by implications and conclusions of the present study for theory and practice.

Summary of Findings

This study examined the relationship between the knowledge of school psychologists, and their respective skills and attitudes towards LGBTQ+ youth with whom they work in schools. While discussing the results of this research, it is important to note that very few studies have surveyed school psychologists about their own practices and involvement with LGBTQ+ youth in schools. While studies have looked at student self-reports about school climate and overall views of their school experiences, the literature lacks data regarding how school psychologists perceive the status of their own schools. Therefore, there are not comparable statistics for many of the research questions and findings. These findings should serve as a pilot and influencing factor for future research within the field of school psychology and policy development.

Knowledge of Federal Legislations.

Q1: What percentage of a national sample of school psychologists’ aware of current federal legislations already protecting LGBTQ+ youth?

All five questions included on the survey about federal legislations had correct responses at or above 80%, indicating that 80% or more of the sample was able to accurately identify information about the legislation surrounding LGBTQ+ protection in the United States. Findings indicated that this sample of school psychologist does have awareness of legislations
that are in place. However, it is uncertain as to whether or not they are aware of the specific ways that each law protects the LGBTQ+ population. There is not comparable data from other studies regarding the amount of policy knowledge that school psychologists have, therefore, this is a free-standing statistic that can help to inform future policy-based studies that are interested in looking further into the amount of knowledge school-based mental health practitioners have.

**Implementation of Protections in Schools.**

Q2: *What percentage of this national sample of school psychologists implementing current federal legislations already protecting LGBTQ+ youth in their practices?*

Reports of protections offered to LGBTQ+ youth in schools varied greatly. 71.1% of the sample at hand reported that LGBTQ+ students in their schools are allowed to dress representing their gender identity. 62.3% of the sample indicated that students are allowed to use their preferred names and pronouns at school. Furthermore, 51.6% reported that students are allowed to form GSAs within their respective schools. This data is similar to the student self-report within GLSEN’s most recent study, which showed that 53.3% of students attended schools that had a GSA or similar organization. However, data addressing school psychologists providing direct services regarding LGBTQ+ youth differed significantly. Only 12.3% of the sample (n=38) endorse that they have provided professional developments or trainings to other school staff as part of their role in their district. When asked about provision of mental health services for LGBTQ+ youth, 27.6% (n=85) endorsed that they have provided such services at some point of time within their current jobs. Both of these statistics indicate the overall lack of direct engagement in the school psychology profession. Barriers to this provision could be lack of training for the providers themselves, lack of time and resources, and/or push back from administrators at the school or district level.
Inclusive School-Based Policies.

Q3: What percent of sampled school psychologists’ reports of comprehensive school policies in their districts (i.e., protections for both gender and sexuality expression)? Do these findings mirror national data from student self-reports (i.e. GLSEN, 2019)?

Findings for this research question indicated that 46% of the sample (n= 142) reported that their schools’ have comprehensive policies in place. Results in this study are significantly higher than national findings per student self-reports. 12.6% of students stated that their schools had comprehensive policies in the most recent version of the National School Climate Survey (GLSEN, 2019). With that being said, school-based mental health practitioners may have more awareness of the implementations and policies in place, which could be why there is a significant difference among the findings in these two studies.

Positive Attitudes Towards an Inclusive School Climate.

Q4: What percent of the national sample of school psychologists reflect an attitude towards increasing inclusion and a welcoming school climate for LGBTQ+ youth?

The survey administered asked six questions regarding the participants’ attitudes towards a positive school climate for LGBTQ+ youth. Answers ranked as “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” were considered to be positive responses. Two of the questions were reverse coded, meaning that responses of “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” were indicative of positive attitudes towards supportive climates for LGBTQ+ youth. All six questions had a positive response rating of 70% or higher, meaning that the majority of the sample supported inclusive and welcoming school climate beliefs within this study. The most positively responded questions were as follows. 94.2% of the sample agreed that students are entitled to gender and sexuality self-expression and 94.5% of the sample agreed that same sex dates are acceptable for prom and other dances. The lowest response within these six questions was use of bathrooms based on gender identity (rather
than biological sex). 72.1% of the sample showed positive attitudes towards allowing gender fluid or non-conforming youth to use bathrooms of their choosing. Interestingly enough, this policy and school-climate question in particular, is one of the most widely discussed both in educational policies and case studies, as well as within the media at large. While the psychologists in this sample have probably been exposed to conversations regarding bathroom use more than any of the other questions, their personal beliefs regarding this are still spread out.

Reflection of Attitudes of Practicing School Psychologists as seen through their Self-Reported Knowledge and Skills.

Q5: Are there significant statistical relationships between the knowledge of federal policies, the capability and skills to implement said policies in schools, and overall practitioner attitude towards LGBTQ+ youth?

It was hypothesized that school psychologists with a higher level of knowledge (based on research question one would indicate higher levels of skills and attitudes within the survey instrument. This sample reported an overall high level of knowledge of federal policies within the study. Knowledge of federal policies was not correlated and indicative of a positive interaction with attitude of practitioners. However, there was a positive correlation between attitude towards LGBTQ+ youth in schools and skills exhibited. While there was not a three-way interaction between knowledge, skills, and attitude. The variable of skills did positively interact with attitude. An interesting takeaway from this dataset is that the majority of school psychologists were able to correctly identify federal laws, but far less of the sample identified implementation of skills within their schools. This sample also presented with an overwhelmingly positive disposition towards positive school climates and dispositions within their respective districts. It seems that the biggest gap within the practice at this time is that
school psychologists are not actively involved in the formation of policies, and do not apply skills in their schools that are supportive of inclusive school climates.

**Impact of Grade Levels Serviced on Overall Knowledge.**

Q6: *Does the knowledge of practitioners vary depending upon the primary age and grade level of students serviced?*

It was hypothesized that practitioners working with youth in grades 6-12, and youth who are adolescent aged, were more likely to have more knowledge of federal policies. Similar to research question five, practitioners across all grade levels had an overall high level of knowledge about federal policies. The regression indicated that there is not a significant relationship between grade levels serviced and amount of knowledge. Therefore, the initial hypothesis of secondary practitioners having a higher level of base knowledge is rejected due to the fact that elementary level practitioners also showed a significant and positive interaction with knowledge in these calculations. Future studies and analyses with this data set may seek to analyze grade level serviced (i.e., grades 6-12) alongside the demographics of the school (i.e., rural, suburban, urban), as this could be an additional indicator of the knowledge of professionals working within these schools. In addition, the interactions shown within the data for this research question suggests that perhaps psychologists that work with youth across the span of development (i.e., K-12 practitioners) have the best and most holistic knowledge and approach to LGBTQ+ youth. Future studies should look to investigate this concept in more depth.

**Limitations**

For one, additional information could have been collected as part of the survey in order to gain more data for analyses. Specifically, information regarding the knowledge that school psychologists had about LGBTQ+ specific case law would have been interesting for comparison and follow up analyses. Furthermore, additional demographic data, such as specific age, rather
than age ranges, would have been helpful so that the mean age of participants could be calculated. Gathering the ethnicity of respondents, while not necessary, may have provided an additional angle for post-hoc analyses or future studies. Additionally, questions regarding primary job responsibilities would have been informative for the data analyses. Data regarding the split of respondents’ job responsibilities (i.e., testing for special education eligibility, consultative practices, counseling practices) would have given further insight into the amount of time practitioners are able to spend on LGBTQ+ specific topics.

It also should be noted that the internal consistency and reliability of construct included in this measure are a limitation. Data was below the “acceptable” cut point for the Cronbach’s alpha, indicating that the hypothesized constructs were not internally consistent on the items within this instrument. This is something to make note of when interpreting and analyzing the results. Another distinct limitation of survey research involving self-responding is that data is based on the participant’s view and perception of self, as well as their knowledge of their school’s policies and functioning in this case. Therefore, data collected does not necessarily reflect district or school-wide trends, as much as it reflects the individual’s perception and knowledge of the school’s functioning.

Implications and Future Research

The results of the present study have valuable theoretical and clinical implications. The outcomes can inform empirical research and clinical practices related to LGBTQ+ services in schools. The findings of this study should be used to improve future research and practice in light of its findings and limitations.

First of all, results of this investigation provide support for consultation theory and advocacy work within the field of school psychology. Findings suggested that the sample had knowledge regarding policies. In other words, when asked to identify what each regulation
stood for, school psychologists were able to choose the correct responses. Furthermore, for the most part, attitudes towards inclusion and equality for LGBTQ+ youth was positive as well. The disconnect within this data is that school psychologists seem to be wholly unaware of the policies that are in place within their respective districts. The majority of those who did identify school-based inclusive policies within their districts reported that they were not involved in the creation of these policies. In fact, only 3.6% of psychologists who stated that policies exist within their districts (42.9% of the sample) reported that they were involved in the creation of said policies. This percentage should be significantly higher, mainly due to the fact that school psychologists are primary stakeholders for the mental health and advocacy of all youth in public schools.

A key role of school psychologists, as well as a major area of best practices, is consultation. While school psychologists are largely trained about their roles and responsibilities as consultants in school districts, the data at hand seems to suggest that school psychologists may be under prepared to consult on LGBTQ+ issues in their schools. Findings from this study suggest that while school psychologists often have the attitudes and knowledge to support healthy school climates for LGBTQ+ youth, they do not have the skills to do this appropriately. As identified in the limitations section, this could be due to their work load, or due to other variables such as administrative oversight or lack of resources. If school psychologists do not have the necessary skills to support LGBTQ+ youth in schools, chances are that their school staff (i.e., teachers and paraprofessionals) also lack knowledge. School psychologists have the capability to facilitate change and education within their schools by training teachers and other educators. However, in order to do that, psychologists must first have better developed skills themselves. With that being said, there seems to be a need for development of professional development trainings specifically targeted for school
psychologists. While there has been an uptick in the presence of such presentations and trainings at recent national conventions, there needs to be more, especially on topics such as consultation and collaboration with educational professionals. There also needs to be a shift in the training expectations for practitioners who are being prepared to enter the workforce. APA and NASP expects practitioners to have competency in serving diverse populations. LGBTQ+ youth do fall within the spectrum of diversity; thus, schools should be better preparing their graduate students to evaluate, consult, and counsel with LGBTQ+ students across the country.

In order to create more inclusive schools across the country, follow up studies need to be conducted on a regional and individual state level. These studies would for one, analyze state policies and initiatives being utilized to propel positive supports into schools for LGBTQ+ youth. In addition, specific school districts would be sought out for their participation. This would allow researchers to gain valuable insight regarding the types of policies that are in place in districts, as well as what personnel served on the committees that created the policies that are in place. These kinds of follow-up studies would help to create a database that supported additional trends and happenings in the servicing of LGBTQ+ youth in American schools.

**Conclusion**

Currently, limited information exists about the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of school psychologists working with LGBTQ+ youth within the literature base. This study sheds light on this important, yet under-researched area, and provides insight into the next steps for advocacy and consultation within the field. By providing greater insight into the relationship among knowledge, skills, and attitudes of school psychologists, this study provides an important framework towards creating more effective consultative models and advocacy efforts to support best practices in today’s schools. School psychologists should see this data as a call to action for better serving LGBTQ+ youth in America’s education system.


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Queer Students, Faculty, and Staff During the Obama Administration. In *The Obama Administration and Educational Reform* (pp. 291-311). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.


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U.S. Constitution, amendment XIV.

U.S. Educational Amendments, Title IX.


Whitman, J. S. (2013). Training school professionals to work with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning students and parents. In E. S. Fisher & K. Komosa-Hawkins (Eds.), *Creating safe and supportive learning environments: A guide for working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth and families*. (pp. 123–139).


Q1  Welcome to the research study!

We are interested in understanding how LGBTQ+ students are served by school psychologists. You will be presented with information relevant to the school psychology practice, your responses will be kept completely confidential and anonymous.

The survey should take you around 10 minutes to complete, and you will receive entry into a raffle for one of three $25 gift cards for your participation.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. If you would like to contact the principal investigator in the study to discuss this research, please e-mail Amy Tiberi at tiberia@duq.edu.

By clicking the button below you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are at least 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

  ○ I consent, begin the study (1)
  ○ I do not consent, I do not wish to participate (2)
Start of Block: Demographics

Q4 Are you a current masters or doctoral student in school psychology?
   ○ Yes (1)
   ○ No (2)
   ○ Other (3)

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you a current masters or doctoral student in school psychology? = Yes

Q5 What is the highest degree you hold in psychology?
   ○ Master's (1)
   ○ Master's + Level Specialist (2)
   ○ EdD (3)
   ○ PsyD (4)
   ○ PhD (5)

Q6 How many years have you served as a school psychologist?
   ○ 1-5 years (1)
   ○ 6-10 years (2)
   ○ 11-15 years (3)
   ○ 16+ years (4)

Q7 What level of employment do you currently hold?
   ○ Employed Full Time (1)
   ○ Employed Part Time (2)
   ○ Employed through a Contract (3)
Q8 Why type of school do you most commonly serve in your role as a school psychologist?

- Public (1)
- Private (2)
- Parochial (3)
- Charter (4)
- Other (5)

Q9 Which of the following best describes the community of the school you most commonly serve in your role as a school psychologist?

- Urban (1)
- Suburban (2)
- Rural (3)
- Online (4)

Q10 Indicate the grade level of your school (s)

- Elementary (K-5) (1)
- Middle School (6-8) (2)
- High School (9-12) (3)
- Other (4) ________________________________
Q11 What gender do you most identify with?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Gender Variant (3)
- Other (4) ________________________________
- Prefer not to specify (5)

Q12 What is your sexual orientation?

- Straight (1)
- Gay (2)
- Bisexual (3)
- Asexual (4)
- Other (5) ________________________________
- Prefer not to specify (6)

Q13 What is your age?

- 20-24 (1)
- 25-35 (2)
- 36-45 (3)
- 46-59 (4)
- 60+ (5)

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Training
Q18 I received training during my *graduate education* regarding best practices for LGBTQ+ youth in schools.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q23 I was prepared to work with LGBTQ+ youth when I entered the workforce.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q20 I received *professional development* regarding best practices for LGBTQ+ youth in schools.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)
Q22 I am aware of the *educational law and the protections* LGBTQ+ youth have through federal regulations.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

End of Block: Training

Start of Block: Attitudes

Q16 Please help us understand how you view these issues that are often related to LGBTQ+ matters.

Q14 It is acceptable for schools to restrict participation in extracurricular activities based on the biological sex of the student (i.e. male tennis team or female dance club).

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)
Q25  Same sex dates are acceptable at prom.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q26 It is acceptable to provide meeting space for the chess club and decline the Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) meeting space.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)
Q27 It is acceptable to allow gender diverse students to use bathrooms consistent with their gender identity.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q28 A student is entitled to gender and sexuality self-expression in public schools.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q29 Transgender students are allowed to use their name and pronouns in school even if these are in disagreement with names on legal documents (i.e., birth certificates, social security cards).

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

End of Block: Attitudes
Q30 Does the school district you work for have inclusive policies (i.e., anti-bullying and nondiscrimination) specifically for LGBTQ+ youth in place?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Display This Question:
If Does the school district you work for have inclusive policies (i.e., anti-bullying and nondiscrimination) = Yes

Q31 If yes, were you involved in the development of those policies?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q32 Does your school district allow students to use their preferred names and pronouns?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q33 Does your school district allow students to dress to represent their gender identity?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)
Q34 Does your school district allow students to form Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) groups or otherwise support the practice of GSAs on campus?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q35 Do classes in your school(s) welcome inclusive curriculums (i.e. curriculums that discuss LGBTQ+ issues)?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q36 Have you provided professional development to staff members (i.e. teachers, paraprofessionals, social workers) on sexual and gender identity development?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Other (3) ________________________________

Q37 Do you currently provide mental health services (i.e. therapy/support groups) for LGBTQ+ youth?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

End of Block: Implementation
Q38 The First Amendment of the Constitution covers:

- Double jeopardy (1)
- Search and seizure (2)
- Due process (3)
- Freedom of speech, religion, press, and assembly (4)

Q39 The Equal Access Act of the Fourteenth Amendment:

- Applies to extracurricular activities in public schools (1)
- Ensures that students have access to meeting spaces and resources (2)
- Relates to both curricular, as well as non-curricular clubs, such as gender-sexuality alliances (GSAs) (3)
- All of the above (4)

Q40 The Fourteenth Amendment applies to students in which of the following ways:

- Students have a right to self-expression (1)
- Students have rights to equal access of school resources (2)
- Students have a constitutional right to equal protection (3)
- None of the above (4)

Q41 What is the primary purpose of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972?

- To provide protections against cases of sexual harassment (1)
- To prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs (2)
- To allow for filing of complaints after incidents of sexual discrimination (3)
Q42 The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) handles which of the following?

- Confidentiality of student records (1)
- Parental access to review school-maintained data and records (2)
- Release of student information (3)
- All of the Above (4)

Q37 For any of the last five questions, did you look up the answer?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

End of Block: Legislation

Start of Block: Giftcard

Q43 If you would like to be entered into a drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card please enter your email address. Email addresses will be separated from survey responses automatically. Thank you!

End of Block: Giftcard