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SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

School Counselor Transgender Advocacy Development: An Exploratory Qualitative Study

by

Jack F. Jacobs

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bellarmine University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

August 2017

The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the

Dissertation of

Jack F. Jacobs

An Exploratory Study on the Transgender Advocacy Development of School Counselors

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Jack F. Jacobs

## Abstract

School counselors have an opportunity to develop as an advocate for their transgender students who face many adversities in life. However, there exists a paucity of research specific to school counselor advocacy and no literature specific to school counselors developing as advocates for transgender students. In an attempt to address the gaps in the literature, the purpose of this qualitative research was to explore how three school counselors in a large urban school district in the southeast United States participating in an inquiry group developed as transgender advocates while completing a passion project. The conceptual framework components of the study were: Queer theory, trans critique, and the American Counseling Association's (ACA) Advocacy Competencies. The study was informed by research questions focused on how school counselors develop as advocates for transgender students, affordances of transgender advocacy development, and limitations faced. Multiple forms of data were collected, including transcriptions of inquiry group meetings, journals, surveys, document review, and analytic memos. The three thematic findings developed through data analysis were (1) transgender advocacy development, (2) affordances of transgender advocacy development, and (3) limitations of transgender advocacy development. Implications for school counselors, school counselor organizations, and future research are presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of the study's limitations. (*Keywords: transgender, school counselors, advocacy development*).

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DEDICATION

To all the school counselors and transgender students positively transforming realities.

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction to the Study**

Transgender students face numerous severe adversities in life, often at disproportionate levels when compared to other students (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009). Transgender students face these adversities in their homes, at their school, and in every aspect of society (Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008). The research on these adversities and how they effect transgender students is limited.

Students who identify as lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) receive more supports and resources within their schools, creating more tolerable school experiences for this group of students when compared to transgender students' school experiences (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). In the most recent Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) comprehensive survey on the school experiences of students who identify as LGB, Kosciw et al. (2016) found that in 2015 LGB students experienced fewer instances of verbal harassment, physical harassment, and physical assault based on sexual orientation since 2013. Although LGB students reported a need to improve school climates, they also reported several positives that included a continued decrease in LGB-specific harassment and assault and an increase of LGB-related resources and supports such as Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) and supportive school staff (Kosciw et al., 2016). Schools continue to be successful in dedicating time, resources, and support in an attempt to create a more inclusive, accepting, and positive climate for students who identify as LGB (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Kosciw et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2016).

Most studies in this field typically include individuals who identify as transgender with individuals who identify as LGB, creating the LGBT acronym. This may cause some uninformed

researchers to inaccurately report LGBT findings in a study without transgender participants or without gender identity demographics (Rands, 2009; Wimberly, 2015a). For example, in one published scholarly study with the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender in the title and with results, discussions, recommendations, and implications for LGBT students, the authors noted in their limitations section that the study did not include any transgender youth in the study (Rands, 2009).

GLSEN has conducted seminal studies, which include both overall LGBT reports and a transgender-specific report. GLSEN's work has provided researchers data on school experiences of students from the LGBT perspective as well as data specific to transgender students. However, GLSEN has not always reported transgender-specific data related to the school experiences of students. And while GLSEN has improved in this regard, the organization has only published one comprehensive transgender-specific report (Greytak, Kosciw, and Diaz, 2009).

Transgender students report at high rates that they are not supported at school and report negative school experiences at a disproportionately higher rate than cisgender LGB students and cisgender straight students (Greytak et al., 2009; Stieglitz, 2010; Wimberly, 2015b). Most transgender students (82%) feel unsafe at school because of a personal characteristic, most notably their sexual orientation and gender expression (Greytak et al., 2009). Consequently, major issues are created by our society for transgender students within the school setting (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009).

### **School Experiences of Transgender Students**

Butler (1999) posited that gender has been constructed by society and is simply an illusion; that society stipulates gender as binary and certain kinds of gender identities cannot

exist. Butler (1999) argued that “because certain kinds of ‘gender identities’ fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain” (p. 24). Most often, individuals who identify as transgender are marginalized or invisible in the eyes of society and societal institutions such as schools (Butler, 1999; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). Unrightfully seen as less-than full members of society, transgender students do not receive the support afforded to other students in schools nor do they receive the transgender-specific support required during formative years (Stryker, 2008). The marginalization of transgender students within schools creates an adverse environment and possibly a negative life trajectory for these students (Stryker, 2008).

As indicated in the GLSEN report authored by Greytak et al. (2009), when asked about their perceptions of school safety, 65% of transgender students reported not feeling safe at school based on how they expressed their gender. Transgender students also reported many other negative school experiences based on their gender identity and gender expression including physical harassment (53%), physical assault (26%), and verbal harassment (87%) (Greytak et al., 2009). Moreover, transgender students were disproportionately more likely to be sexually harassed at school, intentionally excluded by other students, and cyberbullied (Greytak et al., 2009). These negative school experiences are linked to causing this group of students to miss school more often, receive lower grades, and feel as though they do not belong to the school community (Greytak et al., 2009). Furthermore, negative school experiences for transgender students can lead to a litany of negative life experiences or adversities, including suicide, homelessness, mental health issues, substance abuse, and many more (Bolton, 2009; James et al., 2016; Stieglitz, 2010; Stryker, 2008).

## SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

According to Greytak et al. (2009), most transgender students did not report school incidents of harassment or assault to school staff and only 33% of the students who did report felt that the interventions by school staff were effective. Although transgender students face more adversities in school than do students who identify as LGB, male, and female, the data indicated that they are also often more communicative about their issues with school staff than their peers whom do not identify as transgender (Greytak et al., 2009). However, only 36% of transgender students reported being able to identify several supportive school staff members (Greytak et al., 2009). Additionally, a large number of transgender students reported hearing school staff make negative comments about someone's gender expression (39%) with only minimal intervention (11%) related to this inappropriate behavior (Greytak et al., 2009). In brief, within school environments, most transgender students report that they are not supported by school staff, due to a lack of adults open to supporting them or ineffectiveness of the school staff (Greytak et al., 2009; Wimberly, 2015b).

For transgender students, the abundance of negative experiences in the school setting and the lack of effectively supportive school staff, has created an adverse environment that either engenders or exacerbates already existing barriers to a positive and healthy life trajectory and may cause disproportionality in (a) engagement in life threatening behaviors, (b) decreased academic performance, (c) absenteeism, (d) limited college aspirations, and (e) lower perceived sense of school belonging, to list a few (Greytak et al., 2009; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Wimberly, 2015b).

Compounding the seemingly endless and disproportionate list of negative experiences and adversities facing transgender students, research specific to addressing the needs of this



group of students is limited (Gonzalez, 2014; Lev, 2004; Wimberly, 2015a). In recent years, a limited number of studies have focused solely on the experiences of individuals who identify as transgender (Greytak et al., 2009; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Riggle, Rostosky, McCants, & Pascale-Hague, 2011; Stieglitz, 2010). Some researchers have recommended research specific to transgender students within the K-12 educational system (Graves, 2015; Wimberly, 2015a; Singh & Burnes, 2009), yet there remains a lack of this type of research. Singh and Burnes (2009) encouraged such research, writing, "...there is increasing evidence that this population is in desperate need of support within the school system" (p. 216).

Finally, researchers have called for transgender-specific research that supports schools' staff with knowledge, preparedness, advocacy, and leadership within their schools, specifically listing school counselors as key to supporting transgender students (Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002; Gonzalez, 2014; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Israel, 2004; Lev, 2004; Nealy, 2017; Singh & Burnes, 2009; Wimberly, 2015a). However, the extant research supporting the efforts in schools to support transgender student is minimal. There are no studies specific to school counselors serving as transgender advocates and only Gonzalez's (2014) study focused on school counselors as LGBT advocates.

### **Problem Statement**

Considering the disproportionately numerous adversities and negative health risks that transgender students often face, it is no surprise that researchers have called on school counselors to serve as advocates for transgender students. However, not only is there limited support available for school counselors, the research specifically related to school counselors developing as transgender advocates are nonexistent.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the development of three school counselors collaborating in an inquiry group focused on developing as transgender advocates for the students within their schools.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions addressed in this study related to the involvement of school counselors in an inquiry group focused on transgender advocacy development:

1. How do three school counselors participating in a professional inquiry group develop as advocates for transgender students?
2. What does this advocacy afford school counselors?
3. What are the limitations faced by school counselors developing as transgender advocates?

These research questions were addressed through a qualitative study exploring the transgender advocacy development of three school counselors who participated in an inquiry group.

### **Assumptions**

The assumptions that have influenced this research are that (a) school counselors will have limited knowledge regarding supporting transgender students, (b) many school counselors are seeking trainings specific to supporting transgender students, and (c) most school counselors will not feel comfortable serving as the leader in their school as a transgender advocate.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This study employed a conceptual framework approach designed to explore school counselors' experiences in an inquiry group focused on transgender advocacy development, while simultaneously empowering the school counselors. The composition of the conceptual framework includes queer theory (Butler, 1990), the trans critique to queer theory (Stryker, 2004), the American Counselors Association's (ACA) advocacy competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002). Approaching the study through a catalytic validity (Lather, 1991) lens extended the conceptual framework to directly effect the lives of transgender students.

## **Key Terminology**

The terms used in this dissertation have been deliberately selected in order to provide lucidity, clarity, and correctness. In an effort to maintain conciseness in this chapter, a more extensive LGBTQ terminology section can be found in Appendix A. The following key terms are defined below: advocacy, adversities, cisgender, gender identity, LGBT, school counselor, and transgender.

**Advocacy.** Whereas Merriam-Webster (n.d.) broadly defines advocacy as “the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal,” Myers, Sweeney, and White (2002) narrowed the definition so that it is applicable to school counselors' transgender advocacy work, writing, “Counselors may plead the cause of others...and may find themselves intervening with systems and organizations as well as individuals and families” (p. 394). Moreover, transgender advocacy is an obligatory function of school counselors working in schools (American School Counselor Association, 2005; Gonzalez, 2014; Lewis et al., 2002).

**Cisgender.** Navetta (2016) defined cisgender, often termed cis, as “an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth” (p. 64). Whereas cisgender is the preferred term, the term non-trans is considered inappropriate.

**Gender identity.** Navetta (2016) defined gender identity as “one’s deeply held personal, internal sense of being male, female, some of both, or neither” (p. 65). Biological sex and gender identity do not always coincide (Navetta, 2016). Gender identity awareness often occurs during infancy (Navetta, 2016).

**Inquiry group.** On the function of inquiry groups, Reason and Heron (1999) asserted:

We believe that good research is research *with* people rather than *on* people. We believe that ordinary people are quite capable of developing their own ideas and can work together in a co-operative inquiry group to see if these ideas make sense of their world and work in practice. (p. 1)

For the purpose of this study, four inquiry group sessions were held in which school counselors met to work with each other and myself on the transgender issues within their own schools. The inquiry group worked to make sense of the issues and to address them.

**LGBT.** Navetta (2016) defined LGBT as an “acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender which refers to these individuals collectively” and further explained that the letter Q is often added to represent questioning or queer individuals, forming the acronym LGBTQ (p. 66). LGB is the acronym used by researchers when data is specific to the sexual orientations of individuals lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, but excludes data specific to gender identity.

**Passion project.** Participants of this study worked to address a transgender issue which existed at their schools. This work became their passion, which was supported by the inquiry group. During the study we termed this work passion projects.

**Transgender.** Transgender, explained by Navetta (2016), is “a term that may be used to describe people whose gender expression does not conform to cultural norms and/or whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth” (p. 68). This term is often used to describe people whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth. Transgender is also considered by some an umbrella term for anyone who does not conform to the gender norms of society in relation to identity and/or expression (Rands, 2009; Stryker & Whittle, 2006; Wilchins, 2004). While the term I have opted to use is transgender, the literature referenced in this study maintains the original authors’ choice of terminology.

### **Summary**

Transgender students face many adversities which may be detrimental to their development, health, and life trajectory (Greytak et al., 2009; Stryker, 2008). And while school counselors have been recommended to advocate for transgender students, the research supporting the transgender advocacy development of school counselors is absent. Using the ACA’s advocacy competencies as a model for advocacy development, this study will explore how school counselors participating in an inquiry group develop as transgender advocates.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Transgender students face numerous adversities in life, often at severe and at disproportionate levels when compared to other students (Greytak et al., 2009). Greytak et al. (2009) found that transgender students face these adversities in their homes, at their school, and in every aspect of society. The research and findings on these adversities and how they effect transgender students is limited (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). Findings specific to the school experiences of transgender students indicate that school can be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of transgender students due to harassment, bullying, isolation, and a feeling that school is unsafe (Mustanski, Andrews, & Puckett, 2016). And while more transgender students report feeling comfortable speaking to school counselors (54%) than any other school staff, school counselors are not having conversations with transgender students at corresponding rates (Greytak et al., 2009). Furthermore, researchers and school counselor professional organizations posit that school counselors are in a position to advocate for transgender students, calling on them to serve as transgender advocates (Carroll et al., 2002; Gonzalez, 2014; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Israel, 2004; Lev, 2004; Lev et al. 2002; Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009; Nealy, 2017b; wARatts & Hutchins, 2009; Toporek et al., 2009; Whitman et al., 2007). Ratts and Hutchins (2009) recommended that school counselors can develop as transgender advocates “by using the ACA [American Counselor Association] Advocacy Competencies” (p. 269). However, to date there is an absence of empirical studies germane to the development of school counselors’ transgender advocacy development and only one specific to LGBTQ (Gonzalez, 2014; Ratts et al., 2007; Ratts & Hutchins, 2009; Singh & Burnes, 2009).

This chapter reviews the extant literature specific to transgender students and school counselors advocacy development concerning transgender students. The first section examines the experiences of transgender students, relying on GLSEN's seminal research. The adversities faced by transgender individuals is investigated in the second section. The third section reviews literature specific to school counselors support of transgender students. The study's conceptual framework is presented in the fourth section. Lastly, this chapter's conclusion constitutes the final section.

### **Experiences of Transgender Students**

In recent years, limited literature has focused solely on the experiences of transgender individuals (Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Herman, Harrison, & Keisling, 2010; Greytak et al., 2009; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Meyer & Sansfaçon, 2014; Nealy, 2017; Rands, 2009; Riggle, Rostosky, McCants, & Pascale-Hague, 2011; Stieglitz, 2010; Stotzer, 2009). Studies focusing on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) consistently tend to heavily concentrate on the LGB aspects only and call for more research on T aspects (Rands, 2009; Singh & Burnes, 2009; Stieglitz, 2010). Moreover, the dearth of research studies focused on examining the school experiences of transgender students has created major gaps in research specific to this group of students (Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002; Graves, 2015; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Lev, 2004; Singh & Burnes, 2009; Wimberly, 2015a). Some researchers have unsuccessfully attempted to fill these research gaps with studies that include the LGBTQ acronym throughout their research study, but either failed to include any transgender-specific data or reported participation levels of transgender individuals at less than 2% of the participants (Rands, 2009). Additionally, Blackburn (2007) reported that even when researchers successfully

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recruit participants who would be able to help begin to fill the research gaps for transgender students there have been documented instances where participants have refused to engage in research studies once the audio recorder was turned on, in fear of further humiliation or going on record as being a victim.

In 1999 GLSEN conducted its first national biennial survey, the National School Climate Survey (NSCS), which was designed to explore school experiences of middle and high school LGBTQ students (GLSEN, 2014). Every two years GLSEN conducts and publishes the findings from the NSCS. When comparing the participants, it was found that in 2001 the NSCS reported “a total of 904 lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender youth from 48 states and the District of Columbia completed the survey” (Kosciw & Cullen, 2002), whereas in 2015 the NSCS reported “a total of 10,528 students...from all 50 states and the District of Columbia” (Kosciw et al., 2016). The average age for the 2001 NSCS was 16.4 as compared to 16.1 for the 2015 NSCS (Kosciw & Cullen, 2002; Kosciw et al., 2016). GLSEN described transgender in 2001, writing, “transgender is used to describe a wide range of identities and experiences including transexual individuals, cross-dressers, intersexed individuals and individuals, regardless of sexual orientation, whose appearance or characteristics are perceived to be gender atypical” (Kosciw & Cullen, 2002). This definition of transgender aligns with this study’s use of the term transgender.

GLSEN’s seminal works included data related broadly to the LGBTQ spectrum of students as well as data specific to transgender students (GLSEN, 2014; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw & Cullen, 2002; Kosciw et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2016). GLSEN has provided seminal research since 1999 and remains as one of the few research studies focused on providing empirical data on the school experiences of LGB students and the only national survey that



provides data on the school experiences of transgender students (GLSEN, 2014; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2016). Recently, a couple of additional research studies specific to life experiences of transgender individuals have been published (Movement Advancement Project & GLSEN, 2016; Mustanski et al., 2016; Orr et al., 2015), which have advanced and supported GLSEN's research. However, it is GLSEN's work specific to the experiences of transgender students which comprise the extant works of empirical research, making GLSEN's studies decidedly seminal works of scholarship.

The 2015 NSCS featured new survey questions in order to produce more transgender-specific data (Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2016). The 2015 NSCS included several different subsections related to the experiences of transgender students as well as the following subtitles which have been previously used in the NSCS report:

- school safety,
- exposure to biased language,
- experiences of harassment and assault at school,
- reporting of school-based harassment and assault,
- experiences of discrimination at school,
- hostile school climate and educational outcomes,
- availability of school-based resources and supports, and
- utility of school-based resources and supports (Kosciw et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2016).

While GLSEN's NSCS exists as the only national study focused on collecting data specific to the school experiences of transgender students, the NSCS report only included a minimal amount of disaggregated data specific to the experiences of transgender students. Of the

139-page 2015 NSCS report, only four paragraphs were specifically related to the disaggregated transgender data (Kosciw et al., 2016).

In 2009, GLSEN published a report titled “Harsh Realities: The Experience of Transgender Youth in Our Nation’s School,” utilizing the disaggregated transgender data from the 2007 NSCS (Greytak et al., 2009). In 2016 I was told that the 2015 NSCS data specific to transgender students will be published in a new edition of “Harsh Realities” in the near future (E. A. Greytak, personal communication, March 8, 2016). However, at a recent Human Rights Campaign (HRC) conference in 2017, GLSEN’s executive director, Eliza Byard, mentioned the lack of transgender data available, including the NSCS, and also promised a new version of Harsh Realities in the near future (HRC, 2017). Therefore, though GLSEN has collected data specific to the school experiences of transgender students, most of the 2015 NSCS disaggregated transgender-specific data is unavailable to researchers, including myself. Transgender-specific data from the 2007 NSCS, limited transgender-specific data from the 2015 NSCS, and categorical LGBT data from the 2015 NSCS are discussed in the following sections in an attempt to provide the most accurate portrayal of school experiences of transgender students.

**2007 NSCS data.** The 2007 NSCS data reported in this section are transgender-specific, disaggregated by respondents’ (n=295) self-identification as transgender (Greytak et al., 2009). While the transgender-specific data included in the 2015 NSCS is the most recent GLSEN data, it is more limited in scope than the work of Greytak et al. (2009). The data in the next six subsections of this literature review come from the only comprehensive and national empirical research on the experiences of transgender students in schools. The 2007 NSCS data alone

provide a rationale for doing this study, as they indicate that our schools are failing transgender students.

***Biased language.*** Most transgender students reported hearing offensive language at school (90%), 97% reported hearing anti-LGBTQ remarks at school, and 90% reported hearing negative comments regarding individuals' gender expression (Greytak et al., 2009). School staff was also reported to have made negative comments about LGBTQ individuals, including homophobic (32%) and transphobic (39%) remarks while at school (Greytak et al., 2009). Moreover, only 11% of transgender students reported that staff in schools intervened upon hearing negative comments about individuals' gender expression and only 16% of students reported staff intervention upon hearing anti-LGBTQ comments (Greytak et al., 2009). Greytak et al. (2009) also found that students in schools intervened at a lower rate when compared to school personnel, upon hearing negative comments made about gender and LGBTQ individuals (Greytak et al., 2009).

***School safety.*** A comparison of transgender-specific data with cisgender-specific data on LGBTQ students indicated that transgender students (82%) report feeling more unsafe at school than do students who identify as female (67%), male (68%) and other gender identity (73%) (Greytak et al., 2009). In a comparison between LGB students and transgender students, Greytak et al. (2009) found that transgender students were more likely to report feeling unsafe at school. Furthermore, the 2007 NSCS found that 46% of transgender students reported missing at least one day of school within a month of the survey due to feeling unsafe at school (Greytak et al., 2009).

***Harassment and assault in school.*** Greytak et al. (2009) discovered that transgender students reported higher rates of victimization related to harassment and assault in school when compared to LGB students and cisgender. Rates of reported victimization for transgender students were higher based on all characteristics surveyed: (a) sex orientation, (b) gender, (c) gender expression, (d) race/ethnicity, (e) disability, and (f) religion (Greytak et al., 2009). However, victimization based on gender expression, gender, and sexual orientation were the most common characteristics reported by transgender students, as shown in Table 1 (Greytak et al., 2009).

**Table 1****Harassment and Assault in School - Transgender Student Victimization**

Category	Percent
<b>Verbal Harassment</b>	
Gender Expression	87%
Gender	72%
Sexual Orientation	89%
<b>Physical Harassment</b>	
Gender Expression	53%
Gender	42%
Sexual Orientation	55%
<b>Physical Assault</b>	
Gender Expression	26%
Gender	16%
Sexual Orientation	28%

*Note: Data from the 2007 NSCS; reported by transgender students.*

The survey also highlighted other forms of harassment transgender students experience at disproportionate rates while at school. Additional negative school experiences faced by

transgender students included deliberate exclusion by other students (92%), being victim of malicious rumors (89%), and cyberbullying victimization (62%) (Greytak et al., 2009). Greytak et al. (2009) recommended further research to discover reasons why transgender students reported higher rates of victimization based on all characteristics surveyed in the 2007 NSCS.

Although transgender students disclosed high levels of victimization at school, a majority (54%) of this group of students did not report the negative attacks to school staff (Greytak et al., 2009). In addition, of those transgender students who did report harassment or assault to school staff, 67% felt that the actions taken by the adults were ineffective (Greytak et al., 2009). In brief, transgender students faced the highest levels of harassment and assault, yet most did not report those negative school experiences to school staff, perhaps due to the perceived ineffectiveness of interventions by schools staff.

***Educational outcomes.*** Negative school experiences were directly correlated to the educational outcomes of transgender students. When looking for correlations between harassment and educational outcomes, Greytak et al. (2009) discovered that transgender students who reported victimization also reported higher levels of absenteeism, lower grade point averages (GPAs), and diminished educational aspirations. The interconnectedness of feeling unsafe at school, emotional stress, and higher rates of absenteeism, which some transgender students reported, could possibly lead to the lower educational outcomes reported (Greytak et al., 2009).

***School engagement.*** Another component of school experiences Greytak et al. (2009) established for their study was school engagement, which was comprised of the study's three

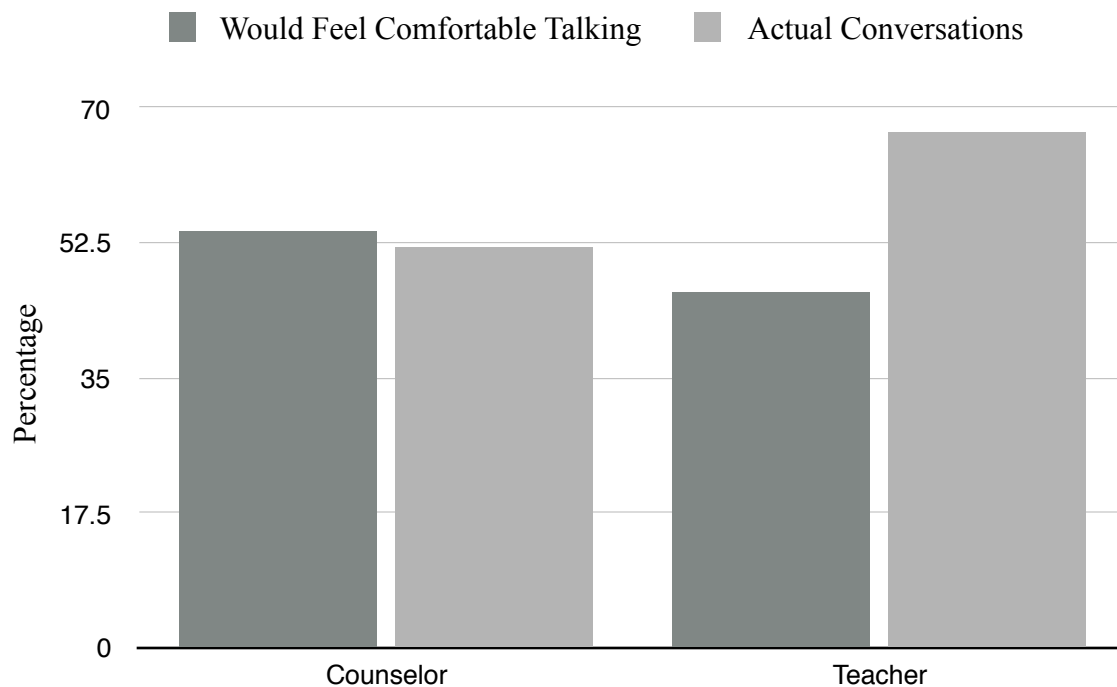
indicators: (a) school belonging, (b) outness, and (c) talking about LGBT-related issues in school.

*School belonging.* When compared to female, male, and other gender identities, transgender students were less likely to feel a belonging to school (Greytak et al., 2009).

*Outness.* The data were similar when comparing the outness of transgender students and cisgender LGB students in regards to sexual orientation and/or gender identity outness to peers (Greytak et al., 2009). However, transgender students reported higher rates of outness to school staff when compared to cisgender LGB students. Additionally, transgender students who were more out at school reported higher levels of feeling more school connectedness and were more likely to report negative school experiences to school staff (Greytak et al., 2009).

*Talking about LGBT-related issues in school.* Although 43% of transgender students reported that discussing LGBTQ issues in class was difficult, most students had discussed such issues at least once within the school year (Greytak et al., 2009). Specific to LGBTQ-related conversations, the school personnel transgender students reported feeling most comfortable talking with were school counselors. However, more transgender students reported that their actual conversations occurred more with teachers than school counselors (Greytak et al., 2009). Since this information is key to this study, the non-congruent data on transgender students feeling comfortable speaking with and actually having conversations with school counselors and teachers is displayed in Figure 1. Moreover, transgender students who felt more school connectedness were also the students who engaged in more LGBTQ-related conversations with a school staff member (Greytak et al., 2009).

## SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT



*Figure 1.* Transgender students’ conversations with school counselors and teachers. Adapted from “Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation’s Schools,” by E. A. Greytak, J. G. Kosciw, and E. M. Diaz, 2009, p. 35. Copyright 2009 by GLSEN.

***School-based resources and supports.*** In order to better understand the school experiences of transgender students, the authors of the 2007 NSCS focused on investigating LGBTQ resources and supports (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008). The 2007 NSCS focused on four forms of resources and supports for the LGBTQ student participants, which included (a) LGBTQ student clubs, (b) LGBTQ-inclusive curricula, (c) supportive staff, and (d) school policies specific to LGBTQ students (Kosciw et al., 2008).

***Student clubs.*** Student clubs that address transgender and other LGBTQ topics are typically called Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) (GLSEN, 2007). In a research brief, GLSEN (2007) presented findings on the positive impact on the climates of schools with GSAs, including, but limited to, fewer negative LGBTQ comments, more likely to hear teachers make

positive comments about LGBTQ people, and a greater sense of connectedness to the school. Of the LGBTQ students who reported having a GSA at their school, transgender students attended meetings more often as compared to cisgender LGB students (Kosciw et al., 2008). However, less than half (44%) of transgender students reported that a GSA existed at their school (Kosciw et al., 2008).

*Inclusive curricula.* Transgender students reported that curricular resources related to LGBTQ topics were missing from schools, including LGBTQ-related literature in the library, online resources, and assignments (Kosciw et al., 2008).

*Supportive staff.* The 2007 NSCS data indicated that 83% of transgender students believed there was an adult at school who they considered an ally, but only 36% of students said that they could identify six or more adult allies (Kosciw et al., 2008).

*School policies.* When students were asked about school policies pertaining to harassment of transgender students, Kosciw et al. (2008) found that only 12% of students reported that their school's policy included transgender-specific language such as gender identity and gender expression.

**2015 NSCS data.** Data in this section is presented in two subsections due to the limited amount of disaggregated transgender-specific data published from the 2015 NSCS. The first subsection is a concise review of the limited transgender-specific data found in the 2015 NSCS publication, disaggregated by the data of transgender students. The second subsection is a review of the broader category of LGBTQ which is presented in the 2015 NSCS. Together, these subsections will provide insight into more current NSCS data and the school experiences of transgender students.



***Transgender-specific data.*** Transgender students reported the highest rates of adverse school experiences among all LGBTQ student participants of the 2015 NSCS (Kosciw et al., 2016). The authors discovered that most transgender students felt unsafe at school due to their sexual orientation (60.2%), gender expression (75.1%), and gender (75.8%), with gender expression and gender being significantly higher rates than reported by students who identify as cisgender LGB. Other adversities facing transgender students are the issues and controversies surrounding the use of restrooms and locker rooms, which garnered high percentages of unsafe feelings and avoidance for transgender students (Kosciw et al., 2016). A majority of transgender students report that they avoid restrooms (69.5%) and locker rooms (56.2%), which is also significantly higher than students who identify as cisgender LGB students (Kosciw et al., 2016).

Transgender students reported encountering the following discriminatory actions while at school: not being allowed to use their preferred names (50.9%), not being allowed to use the restroom of their gender identity (60.0%), or not allowed to wear clothing that aligns with their gender expression and/or gender identity (28.0%) (Kosciw et al., 2016).

***LGBTQ data.*** The 2015 NSCS data not disaggregated for data specific to transgender students still offered data that showed negative school experiences were reported at significantly elevated rates for all LGBTQ students. When considering school safety, 57.6% of LGBTQ students reported feeling unsafe because of their sexual orientation and 43.3% of the students reported feeling unsafe based on their gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2016). LGBTQ students reported an avoidance of restrooms (39.4%) and locker rooms (37.9%) due to concerns for their safety (Kosciw et al., 2016). The effect of feeling unsafe at school caused LGBTQ students to

also report missing school one day (31.8%) and four or more days (10.0%) over the last month of time during data collection.

According to Kosciw et al. (2016), students also reported hearing negative LGBTQ comments in made by both peers and school staff while at school. Most (93.7%) of the students who reported hearing “gay” used in a derogatory manner (67.4%) felt troubled due to the negative way it used (Kosciw et al., 2016). LGBTQ students reported that they often or frequently heard negative comments about gender expression (62.9%) and over a third (40.5%) reported that the negative comments were directed at transgender individuals (Kosciw et al., 2016).

Significant percentages of students reported varying forms of harassment and assault as part of their school experiences. 85.2% of LGBTQ students reported being harassed verbally at school because of their sexual orientation (70.8%) and gender expression (54.5%) (Kosciw et al., 2016). LGBTQ students also reported physical harassment victimization based on sexual orientation (27.0%) and gender expression (20.3%). Specific to victims of physical assault, 13.0% connected their assault to their sexual orientation and 9.4% associated it to gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2016). Almost half (48.6%) reported being a victim of cyberbullying. Whereas 63.5% of LGBTQ students reported that staff did not intervene when a negative attack was reported, 57.6% of LGBTQ students whom were victimized at school did not report it to school personnel (Kosciw et al., 2016).

Kosciw et al. (2016) found that students who identified as LGBTQ and reported higher levels of victimization were more likely to miss school, had lower GPAs, had lower educational aspirations, were more likely to be disciplined at school, were more depressed, and had low self-

esteem, as compared to LGBTQ students who reported lower levels of victimization. There were similar findings when the authors compared students who were discriminated with those who were not discriminated (Kosciw et al., 2016).

When asked about supportive school personnel, 97.0% of LGBTQ students reported that there was at least one adult in school that they identified as supportive (Kosciw et al., 2016). The percentage of LGBTQ students who could identify eleven or more supportive school personnel, labeled by Kosciw et al. (2014) as “highly supported student,” was only 41.2%. When compared to less supported students, highly supported students (a) felt safer at school, (b) had higher attendance rates, (c) felt more school connectedness, (d) had higher GPAs, and (e) had greater educational aspirations (Kosciw et al., 2016).

The 2015 NSCS asked students about school policies and their effects on their school experience. Most LGBTQ students reported that their school had a policy that addressed bullying (83.6%), yet only 10.2% of students said that their policy accounted for bullying specific to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2016). Furthermore, students who indicated that their school did have a comprehensive policy were less likely to hear negative and derogatory comments about LGBTQ people and were more likely to have school personnel serve as upstanders (Kosciw et al., 2016).

### **Adversities of Transgender Life**

*Only one teacher I knew last year spoke highly and nicely of transgender people. Many others either ignore that we exist, or they put us down. No more of that. Please, help schools to give accurate, helpful, and kind information about gender identity and sexuality. (Kosciw et al., 2016, p. 57)*

Transgender individuals are presented with a seemingly endless, widely varying, and profoundly harmful list of adversities, which exist in every aspect of their life, surrounding and permeating them (Bockting, 1997; New York State Education Department, 2015; Stieglitz, 2010). These compounding adversities manifest in many different ways and in different aspects of the life of a transgender individual. Transgender individuals constantly face these harsh adversities, in every facet of their life and in all reaches of society, starting at birth (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Mustanski et al., 2016; Rands, 2009; Samuelson, 2016; Scheman, 1997; Stieglitz, 2010). Limited research has revealed numerous adversities, with possibly even more that have yet to be researched, discovered, and/or broadened in their categorization and severity (Beemyn, 2004; Bockting, 1997; Greytak et al., 2009; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2008; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010; Mustanski et al., 2016; Rands, 2009; Sausa, 2005; Stieglitz, 2010). In the following sections of this review of literature, I grouped the adversities which transgender students often face in the following four subcategories: (a) adversities caused by society, (b) adversities caused by school, (c) adversities caused by family/home, and (d) cumulative adversities. There are transgender adversities which overlap in subcategories and those interconnected adversities will be noted.

The use of epigraphs in this section was purposely designed to help the reader better perceive the adversities in which transgender students may face in society, at school, at home, and cumulatively. The epigraphs are used as literary foreshadowing to the research and data presented, perhaps reminding readers that these data are from real transgender people facing adversities specific to the lived transgender experience.

**Adversities caused by society.**

*My death needs to mean something. My death needs to be counted in the number of transgender people who commit suicide this year. I want someone to look at that number and say 'that's fucked up' and fix it. Fix society. Please. (Alcorn, 2014)*

Society's indoctrination of gender binaries (male or female) based on external sex organs is arguably the most detrimental adversity transgender students face (Butler, 1990; Carroll et al., 2002; Cohen, 2005; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Rands, 2009; Scheman, 1997). The adversity of living in a world with only two viable, approved, and recognized genders is so pervasive that it often the very first words used to describe an infant as it enters the world either be "It's a boy" or "It's a girl" (Feinberg, 1998; Kane, 2006; Stieglitz, 2010; Wilchins, 1997). Furthermore, from the moment those words are uttered to describe the child, his or her life will have an ideal and expected path in the minds of every person who encounters him or her: how they will act, dress, talk, and what their mannerisms will be; with whom they will play, fall in love, and marry; proficiency levels in subjects at school, career types, and sports; etc. (Butler, 1990; Lorber, 1994; Shaw & Lee, 2004). Additionally, toddlers who display behaviors which are gender nonconforming are molded and fixed by society to align their natal sex and their gender behavior (Lorber, 1994; Stieglitz, 2010). The pervasiveness of the adversity of gender binaries eclipses all other adversities and is arguably the cause of all other transgender adversities listed hereafter, because society has unconditionally established that if you are not a boy or a girl, then you are nothing — you are not human (Bornstein, 1994; Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002; Grossman &

D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Lev, 2004; Scheman, 1997; Whitman, Horn, & Boyd, 2007; Wilchins, 1997). On the malevolence of gender binaries, Scheman (1997) wrote:

As our (modern Western) world is now, failure to conform to the norms of gender is socially stigmatizing to an unbearable extent: to be human is just to be male or female, a girl or a boy or a man or a woman. Those who cannot readily be classified by everyone they encounter are not only subject to physically violent assaults, but, perhaps even more wounding, are taken to be impossible to relate to humanly. (pp. 132-133)

Society has historically viewed transgender individuals as inhuman and in turn have treated them as such, openly, harshly, and often with pleasure (Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002; Gagne & Tewksbury, 1996; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Lev, 2004; Robinson et al., 2013; Scheman, 1997; Whitman et al., 2007).

The societal construct of two genders in our society created the inability of some individuals to view transgender individuals as equals or even as humans, a phenomenon known as transphobia. Transphobia is defined as an unfounded fear, hatred, and/or aversion towards people who identify as transgender (Orr, Baum, Brown, Gill, Kahn, & Salem, 2015). The phenomenon of transphobia is a manifestation of the societal construct of a gender binary. In other words, if the societal construct of a gender binary system is an abstract idea, then transphobia is concrete and visible. When people harass, assault, discriminate, ignore, abuse, sexually assault, etc. transgender individuals, it is behind the wall of transphobia (Stotzer, 2009). The crimes against individuals such as Brandon Teena, Tyra Hunter, and Lawrence King who were murdered or when Leslie Feinberg who was refused medical care and left for dead, are examples of how gender binaries have manifested as transphobia (Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002;

Feinberg, 1998; Singh & Burnes, 2009). The progressively increasing murder rate of transgender individuals is only one of many consequences of being transgender in a society of transphobic citizens (Schmider, 2017a, 2017b).

Transphobia has created both blatant and hidden barriers for transgender individuals, including public discrimination. More than half (53%) of transgender individuals reported discrimination, harassment, and/or victimization in public places, such as buses, airports, hotels, and other public organizations (Orr et al., 2015; Stieglitz, 2010). On experiences in retail stores, transgender individuals reported high levels of public discrimination and harassment in the forms of being denied fair treatment (32%), being disrespected (37%), and being assaulted (3%) (Orr et al., 2015). Additionally, transgender individuals report that interactions with helping professionals, such as police officers, doctors, government employees, emergency rooms staff, mental health clinic support, etc., were also negative, discriminatory, and at times abusive (Orr et al., 2015; Stotzer, 2009). Robinson et al. (2013) found that 88.2% of transgender individuals reported that they have faced some form of victimization. The violence and victimization transgender individuals face is most often directly related to their identification as transgender, an identification which is nonexistent in the gender binary world created by society (Stotzer, 2009).

For many transgender individuals the adversities and adversities of health care persist throughout a lifetime. Furthermore, many transgender individuals reported low levels of general health, which was significantly lower than LGB counterparts (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Lombardi, 2001; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). Moreover, in a study that asked transgender individuals about their own life expectancy, 40% of participants reported that

they believed that their lifespan would be shorter than the average lifespan, due to transgender-specific adversities (Stotzer, 2009). Issues concerning the health of transgender individuals are extensive. Therefore, literature specific to transgender adversities within the context of health was reviewed and is presented below in the following subsections: health care access and affordability, mental health concerns, and possible risky transgender lifestyles (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Whitman et al., 2007).

*Health care accessibility and affordability.* The health care experiences of transgender individuals is often accompanied by discrimination, with 19% of individuals who reported not even receiving treatment or care because they were refused service based on their transgender identity (Orr et al., 2015; Stieglitz, 2010). Even when transgender individuals did receive care, it was often an embarrassing, unsafe, and unhealthy experience (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Stieglitz, 2010). Many medical staff verbally harassed (28%) individuals who identified as transgender, while some physically attacked (2%) individuals (Orr et al., 2015). One transgender individual shared the following experience after they visited a doctor for a routine check-up, "I was forced to have a pelvic exam by a doctor when I went in for a sore throat. The doctor invited others to look at me while he examined me and talked about my genitals" (Orr et al., 2015, p. 74). The field of medicine seems to lag behind in terms of understanding transgender health and transgender individuals. 50% of transgender individuals reported that they had to train their health care providers about transgender issues and basic transgender health topics (Orr et al., 2015; Stieglitz, 2010). Another transgender individual reported an experience with an ineffective medical provider: "I have several health issues and have been refused care by one doctor who 'suggested' that I go someplace else because she could not treat me since she 'did not know



anything about transgender people,” (Orr et al., 2015, p. 76). The lack of transgender knowledge, transgender support, transgender understanding, compassion for transgender individuals, and transgender advocacy is documented throughout this literature review and the findings of the aforementioned studies have indicated that health care professionals are inadequately serving transgender individuals. This pattern of transgender adversities and a lack of advocacy connects each of the transgender adversities subsections. The adversities presented are interconnected; the world of a transgender student is burdened with adversity and devoid of advocacy.

Health care affordability is another transgender barrier that has been researched and for many transgender individuals, the accessibility of health care is linked to affordability as well as the fear of discrimination from doctors and medical staff (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Orr et al., 2015; Stieglitz, 2010). Orr et al. (2015) discovered that many transgender individuals reported a delay in receiving health care services when sick or injured due to an inability to pay for the care (48%) or because the health care providers were discriminatory towards their gender identity (28%). These data are only related to basic health care services such as illness, injury, and preventative care, not related to transgender-specific treatment, such as costs of transitioning health care or mental health services. Lastly, transgender individuals reported that experiences of ridicule and discrimination were not only barriers to health care services but were also related to lower self esteem (Stieglitz, 2010).

Most transgender individuals wanted hormone therapy and some form of gender-affirming surgery in order to better align their gender identity with their physical bodies (Orr et al., 2015). Hormone therapy has been associated with reducing depression, eliminating thoughts

of suicide, and improving the overall mental health of transgender individuals (Cohen–Kettenis, Delemarre–van de Waal, & Gooren, 2008). For some individuals, gender-affirming surgeries have also been connected to reducing the harmful effects of living with severe gender dysphoria (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007). However, hormone therapy and other gender-affirming surgeries are transition treatments which are difficult for many transgender individuals to access since they are very rarely covered by health insurance and are expensive (Orr et al., 2015). Additionally, transgender youth who seek hormone therapy must have parental consent during their adolescent years (Cohen–Kettenis, 2008). This is most often their first insurmountable barrier to accessing a treatment that will drastically improve the health and life trajectory (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007; Orr et al., 2015; Stieglitz, 2010). The adversity of inaccessible health care is directly correlated to the adversity of risky health behaviors, including illegally acquiring and administering hormones, sex work, and suicide ideation (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Mustanski et al., 2016; Orr et al., Ryan et al., 2010; 2015; Samuelson, 2016; Stieglitz, 2010; Whitman et al., 2007).

Health care accessibility and affordability adversities are interrelated to the many other adversities caused by the societal construct of gender binary (Stieglitz, 2010). For example, in the study by Orr et al. (2015), one participant demonstrated the struggle of some transgender individuals who tried coping with the compounding adversities of the inaccessibility of transition-related health care and mental health concerns when they stated, “I cannot afford gender reassignment surgery which is crucial to my mental well being and thoughts of suicide are always present” (p. 79). While the mental health well-being of some transgender individuals depends on transitioning from their assigned gender to their affirmed gender, the health care

required to transition may be inaccessible and/or unaffordable, and suicide remains as a solution to this barrier.

*Mental health concerns.* Many transgender individuals experience mental health issues at some point in their life, while some face mental health adversities throughout their entire lifetime (Carroll et al., 2002; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Lev, 2004; Mustanski et al., 2016; New York State Education Department, 2015; Singh & Burnes, 2009; Stieglitz, 2010). The mental health of transgender individuals is often compromised due to constant harassment and attacks by others, as well as self harm. The rate of mental health issues and concerns for transgender individuals are disproportionate not only in relation to the general population, but also in relation to individuals who identify as LGB (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Robinson et al., 2013). Additionally, most medical providers require transgender individuals who are seeking health care during transition to receive counseling (Orr et al., 2015). Therefore, it may not be surprising that 84% of transgender individuals reported receiving counseling services (Orr et al., 2015). However, there are limited resources specific to mental health for transgender youth, including the aforementioned limited accessibility and affordability (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006).

The disproportionality of attempted suicide reported by transgender individuals when compared to the general population mirrors the burdens of being born transgender in a society which simultaneously ignores and abuses (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Lev, 2004). In a comparison of suicide attempt percentages, 1.6% the general population reported attempting suicide in their lifetime, while 41% of transgender individuals reported that they have attempted suicide (Orr et al., 2015), while in the research study by Robinson, Espelage, and Rivers (2013)

more than half (52.4%) of the participants reported at least one suicide attempt within in their lifetime. Grossman and D'Augelli (2007) found that 45% of transgender youth seriously considered suicide, with most participants reporting their first attempt at suicide at the ages of fifteen or sixteen. Upon further analyses of data, Orr et al. (2015) found correlations with higher suicide rates of transgender individuals and (a) being bullied, harassed, assaulted, or expelled (51%); (b) being harassed by school staff (59%); and (c) being physically assaulted by school staff (76%). Transgender youth also correlated suicide attempts to the difficulty of living a life as a transgender (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Robinson et al., 2013). The systems, supports, and humanness that most cisgender individuals take for granted simply do not exist for many transgender individuals, which often takes a toll on the mental health of these individuals: "My suicide attempt had a lot to do with the fact that I felt hopeless and alone in regards to my gender identity" (Orr et al., 2015, p. 83). The feeling of loneliness and lack of support is reflected in Ryan et al.'s (2010) research, where transgender individuals reported low levels of social support. The adversities faced by transgender youth put these youth at risk for life threatening behaviors (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007). For some transgender youth, suicide seemed like the easiest way to deal with their adversities, what others wish would happen, or the best way to help others cope with their own struggle and pain (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Lev, 2004; Robinson et al., 2013). For transgender youth, suicide often seems like a logical solution to a lifetime of adversities.

*Possible risky transgender lifestyles.* Accessibility and affordability of health care treatments for transgender individuals has been directly correlated to risky lifestyles (Stieglitz, 2010). Some transgender individuals who fear ridicule at the hands of health care workers or

who cannot afford health care report purchasing hormones on the street, which often leads to improper dosages being used or abuse of hormones (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Stieglitz, 2010). Moreover, hormones purchased on the street have negatively impacted the health of some transgender individuals by causing serious health issues, including an elevated risk of HIV due to needle sharing (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Stieglitz, 2010).

Homelessness is another adversity faced by transgender individuals (Orr et al., 2015; Whitman et al., 2007) Orr et al. (2015) found that 19% of transgender individuals reported becoming homeless due to being kicked out of their family's house or by other forms of discrimination. Additionally, many individuals who were homeless and sought support from homeless shelters were either rejected outright (29%), asked to leave upon discovery of their gender identity (25%), or left the shelter due to negative treatment (47%) (Orr et al., 2015). Homeless shelters were also reported to be places with high levels of discrimination, harassment, and abuse for transgender individuals (Stieglitz, 2010).

Another transgender adversity directly related to society's gender binary is the struggle to obtain new identification cards and documents based on one's gender identity, even when the individual has transitioned. Only 59% of transgender individuals have a driver's license that corresponds with their gender identity, yet when these individuals present their corresponding identification throughout their daily life, 40% reported being harassed (Orr et al., 2015). Even the basic necessity of identification documents can be a barrier for transgender individuals and this may also lead to further adversities such as harassment upon presenting their identification cards, such as state licenses.

A majority of transgender individuals reported adversities in the form of severe acts of discrimination which disrupted their daily life, experiences Orr et al. (2015) referred to as “cumulative discrimination.” A few examples of these severe discriminatory experiences reported by transgender individuals included homelessness due to prejudice, dropping out of school due to bullying by student and/or school staff members, loss of employment due to prejudice, and assault due to gender identity (Orr et al., 2015). Most (63%) of the individuals reported experiencing at least one life-altering adversity, while 23% reported more severe “cumulative discrimination” by experiencing at least three life-altering adversities (Orr et al., 2015). When Orr et al. (2015) wrote about “cumulative discrimination,” they concluded “these compounding acts of discrimination — due to prejudice of others or lack of protective laws — exponentially increase the difficulty of bouncing back and establishing a stable economic and home life” (p. 8). Hate crimes, such as the murder of transgender individuals, are examples of the most severe acts of discrimination, however there is a dearth of empirical research specific to compounding acts of severe transgender discrimination (Stotzer, 2009).

### **Adversities caused by school.**

*Our biggest issue with the school was their lack of knowledge. At first it was suggested that we switch schools to one that is twelve miles away. (Parent of a seven year old transgender boy, Brill & Pepper, 2008, p. 154)*

As mentioned above, the NSCS has started to provide research on the many adversities that exist in most schools across the United States for transgender students. Additional supporting research exists which reinforces the data presented by the NSCS reports and are

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documented below in school-specific subsections categorized by different multiple adversities (Blackburn, 2007; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Jennings, 2015; Lev, 2004; Lombardi, 2001; Mustanski et al., 2016; Orr et al., 2015; Rands, 2009; Russell et al. 2011; Samuelson, 2016; Singh & Burnes, 2009; Stieglitz, 2010; Whitman et al., 2007)

*School bullying.* Investigating harassment at school, Orr et al.'s (2015) report found that most transgender students reported being harassed (78%) and some reported quitting school due to harassment (15%) (Orr et al., 2015). For the subset of participants who reported quitting school due to harassment, 48% reported being homeless at some point in their life. When examining assault at school, 35% of transgender students reported being physically assaulted at school, with 5% of these reported assaults at the hands of school staff. Orr et al. (2015) found correlations with suicide and harassment and assault, finding 51% of transgender students who faced harassment and/or assault also reported attempting suicide. Other researchers discovered similar negative findings, where young adults who identify as transgender who reported school bullying also reported higher levels of young adulthood depression, suicidal thoughts, low self-esteem, and HIV infection (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Mustanski et al., 2016; Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011; Stieglitz, 2010; Whitman et al., 2007).

The negative experiences and adversities faced at school for many transgender youth are often relentless: name calling; physical assault; inappropriate questioning; being spit upon; verbal harassment; propositioned for sex; not using chosen names/pronouns; taunting; being fun of by teachers, families, and peers; etc. (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Stieglitz, 2010; Whitman et al., 2007). These students are often the most vulnerable students in the school, because they

are the most stigmatized, marginalized, harassed, and victimized students (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Lombardi, 2001; Rands, 2009; Stieglitz, 2010; Whitman et al., 2007). In Samuelson's (2016) article on Mustanski et al.'s (2016) work, Mustanski commented, "...we were struck by how severe it was for some of these kids who were getting highly victimized over their four years of high school," which showed that the severity of the victimization for transgender youth was even shocking to researchers. In their article about cumulative victimization, Mustanski et al. (2016) found a correlation between a reported decrease in victimization and graduation from high school, indicating that transgender youth who are harassed and bullied may not have an alternative for high school and it often only gets better for those who are victimized once they exit high school. Additionally, for those transgender youth who reported that their life experiences improved, there are others who reported victimization at the same or higher levels over time, invalidating the conversations that eventually things will get better (Mustanski et al., 2016; Samuelson, 2016).

*Harmful school staff.* It is often assumed that all members of a school staff, including teachers, principals, security guards, school psychologists, social workers, school counselors, etc., exist to support the students of the school, yet for transgender students this is often not the case (Blackburn, 2007; Lev, 2004; Singh & Burnes, 2009). The harm caused to the transgender students at the hands of school staff is often due to staff members who are untrained, unprofessional, or both (Lev, 2004; Singh & Burnes, 2009). Writing about unprofessional staff members, Lev (2004) pointed out that these students "have been abandoned and ridiculed at times when they have been most in need of genuine compassion" (p. 19). When transgender students lack support at school, not only is there a risk of school drop out, there is also an



increased risk of depression, homelessness, suicidality, and other mental health risks (Singh & Burnes, 2009).

*Education ceases to be priority.* Due to the effects and influences of “cumulative discrimination,” education and school are often eliminated as priorities for transgender students (Blackburn, 2007; Lev, 2004; Singh & Burnes, 2009; Whitman et al., 2007). Instead, transgender students are often in search of more supportive and safer environments, places of acceptance, and for many school is the last place they want to be. When compared to their peers, many transgender students were more likely to drop out of school (Blackburn, 2007; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Lev, 2004; Singh & Burnes, 2009; Stieglitz, 2010), absent more frequently (Whitman et al., 2007), more likely to have significantly lower grades (Whitman et al., 2007), less likely to attend college (Whitman et al., 2007).

*School mirrors society’s gender binaries.* In their book, Brill and Pepper (2008) wrote about a classroom where one student avoided society’s gender binary by hiding in a small room when the teacher asked students to line up by gender. The societal construct of gender binary, girls and boys, is heavily represented in schools and classrooms across the United States (Blackburn, 2007; Jennings, 2015; Rands, 2009). Students are asked to line up, provide their attention, use restrooms, and work in groups by the gender labels of girl or boy. Moreover, educators project certain competencies for different academic areas on the two genders, where the complexity of the construct of gender causes school personnel to believe that boys are better in math and girls are better at writing (Rands, 2009). For all gender identities, the assumptions related to the societal construct of gender may cause adversities within the school setting, but for the transgender students the issue of not being one of the two genders society has established

combined with often being gender stereotyped for a gender with which they do not identify presents distressing adversities within the school setting (Blackburn, 2007; Jennings, 2015; Lev, 2004; Rands, 2009; Singh & Burnes, 2009). Jennings (2015) directly blamed the suicide of a transgender student on "...a society that demands its schools teach the superiority of being cisgender..." (p.345). Therefore, schools are not protecting transgender students from the adversities caused by society. Without school staff members advocating on behalf of transgender students, the school setting mirrors the adversities caused by society.

Although the school setting is often thought of a place in which students will find safety, transgender students have reported multiple times that school is not a place in which they feel safe (Stieglitz, 2010). Research has indicated that schools in fact are very unsafe, hostile, and often dangerous places for transgender students; for transgender students schools are places to be bullied and abused by peers and school staff, where education stops being a priority, and where society's construct of two genders continues to make these students impossibilities (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; GLSEN, 2007; Greytak et al., 2009; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006, 2007; Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Mustanski et al., 2016; Rands, 2009; Robinson et al., 2013; Samuelson, 2016; Scheman, 1997; Singh & Burnes, 2009; Whitman et al. 2007).

### **Adversities caused by family/home.**

*My parents threatened to disown me. 'It was a sin,' 'I was sick,' 'I wanted to mutilate my body,' etc. I drank fairly heavily from when I was 14 on. And I just kept drinking. (Orr et al., 2015, p. 101)*

Experiences within family structures are connected to the life trajectories of transgender individuals. Research has suggested that transgender individuals may not be safe in their own homes (Stotzer, 2009). Many youth who present transgender behaviors are discouraged by their family members to express the gender with which they identify (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Mallon, 1998; Stieglitz, 2010). Rejection and/or abuse at the hands of one's family effects youth who identify as transgender and their life trajectory, typically in a negative or catastrophic manner. Adversities that exist within the family system are often unexpected sparks which set off many other escalating adversities that may consume the world of a student who identifies as transgender (Orr et al., 2015). The adversities found in the home of transgender youth may emanate from family members' struggle to understand gender beyond society's binary system (Cooper, 1999). The following paragraphs provide specific details on the adversities transgender students may face at home.

Arguably the biggest adversity caused by family/home is when transgender youth who experience rejection by a family member. When asked about rejection by a close family member, 40% of transgender individuals reported family rejection (Orr et al., 2015). In a comparison between individuals who faced family rejection with those who were not rejected, those who experienced rejection were more likely to (a) be homeless (26% vs. 9%), (b) perform sex work (13% vs. 7%), and (c) attempt suicide (51% vs. 32%) (Orr et al., 2015). Transgender youth who reported limited family acceptance also reported higher rates of depression, substance abuse, HIV risk, and suicide ideation (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Ryan et al., 2010; Stieglitz, 2010; Whitman et al., 2007). Furthermore, it was supportive parents who were correlated to a reduction in suicide attempts over a lifetime and not the peers of transgender youth (Robinson et al., 2013).

Transgender individuals also face the adversity of domestic violence (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Orr et al., 2015). In their study, Orr et al. (2015) found that 19% of transgender individuals reported family violence. In Grossman and D'Augelli's (2007) study, youth participants reported several forms of family abuse which fell under the two broad categories of verbal abuse (being yelled at, criticized and embarrassed publicly, insulted, etc.) and physical abuse (being slapped, beaten, hit, punched, kicked, etc.). Citing domestic abuse as a physically abusive form of family rejection, those who faced violence at home were more likely to face related adversities at much higher rates than those who were physically abused by their families (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Orr et al., 2015; Robinson et al., 2013; Whitman et al., 2007). Individuals who experienced abuse by a family member reported attempting suicide at a higher rate than those who did not experience violence by their families (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Orr et al., 2015). Also, 48% of respondents who faced family violence reported homelessness compared to 9% who did not report facing family violence. Orr et al. (2015) also found that 29% of the individuals who were victims of family violence reported having participated in sex work as compared to 7% of those who did not face domestic violence.

Surprisingly, when the data was disaggregated by race, while only 46% of Black transgender individuals reported being out to their family, 55% reported that their family relationships were "as strong today as before coming out" and 39% reported rejection from family members (Orr et al., 2015). Of the disaggregated data by race, data for Black transgender individuals was the lowest of all races for outness, highest for positive family relationships post coming out, and lowest for family rejection (Orr et al., 2015). A hidden adversity in the home for

Black transgender individuals may be the rhetoric that causes fear of coming out to family members. Additionally, data disaggregated by race also showed that while 15% of White participants reported domestic violence, all other races reported rates at least double that of their White counterparts (Orr et al., 2015). With limited research on the adversities faced by transgender individuals, there is a paucity of research comparing the life experiences of the different subsets of transgender individuals. Therefore, more research is needed to compare the adversities transgender youth face by race.

In their paper, Orr et al. (2015) found that 64% of transgender individuals reported being out to their families, yet the authors did not clarify whether their data on family rejection, acceptance, and violence were for the entire population in the study or disaggregated for those who were out to their families. However, as mentioned above, Orr et al. (2015) did adjust variables to disaggregate data for correlations and comparisons, which provided new and differing insights into the adversities faced by transgender individuals. Finally, for some families of transgender individuals, the constructs of family acceptance and family rejection may occur simultaneously (Ryan et al., 2010), possibly effecting the data and data analysis in various manners.

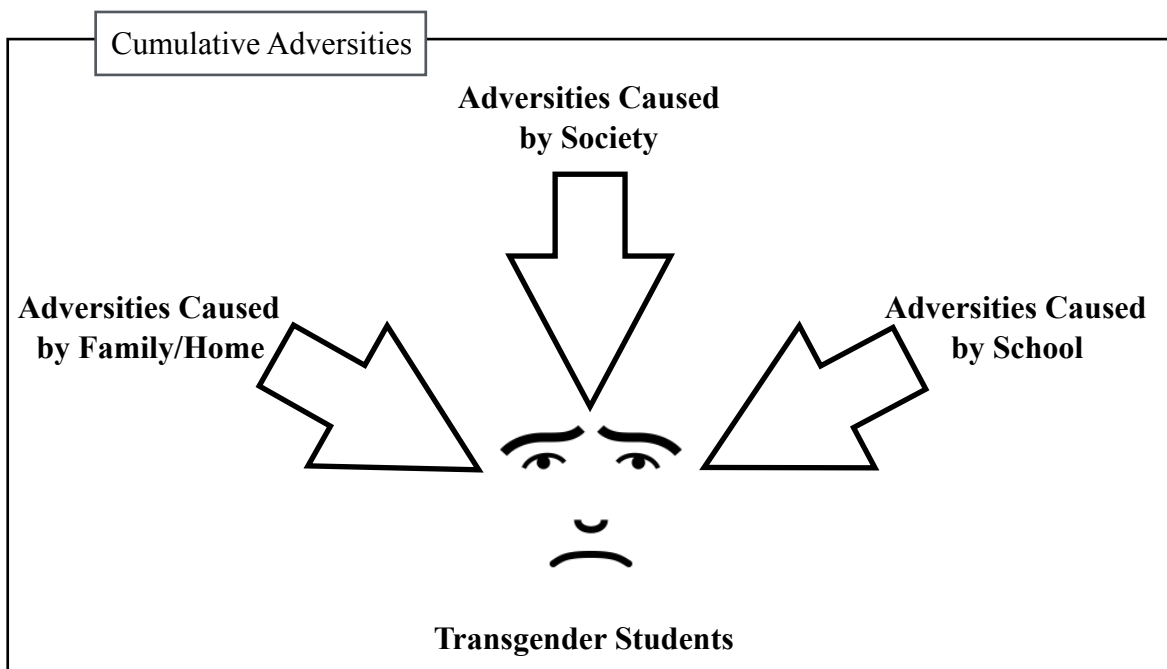
### **Cumulative adversities.**

*...you love your parents so much you will try to kill yourself to keep them from misery...*

*(participant, Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006, p. 124)*

This section on the cumulative adversities transgender youth face is influenced by the three prior subsections: society, school, and family/home. Considering the influences which these

systems have on individuals, Califia (1997) pondered, “Who would you be if you had never been punished for gender-inappropriate behaviors, or seen another child punished of deviations from masculine of feminine norms?” (p.315). Often, transgender individuals encounter Orr et al.’s (2015) “cumulative discrimination,” facing multiple forms of discrimination and harassment, including within their own internal environment. The concept of “cumulative discrimination” framed this section and the concept of cumulative adversities (Orr et al., 2015). Figure 2 provides a visual concept of the cumulative adversities transgender students often encounter.



*Figure 2.* Visual concept of the cumulative adversities transgender students may face. Adapted from “Schools In Transition A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools,” by A. Orr, J. Baum, J. Brown, E. Gill, E. Kahn, & A. Salem, 2015.

Transgender students may be distressed due to their inability to live as their true or affirmed self at home, school, and/or in society (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007; Lev, 2004). Students who choose to challenge the norms of society, their home, and/or their school may end

up facing isolation, rejection, homelessness, abuse, depression, and more. In fact, “throw away youth” is the phrase used to describe transgender youth who are rejected by their families and become homeless. Throw away youth are more likely of (a) doing sex work, (b) being assaulted physically and sexually, (c) using drugs or alcohol, (d) contracting HIV, (e) having a diagnoses of mental illness, and (f) more, when compared to individuals who did not experience homelessness and rejection (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Mustanski et al., 2016; Orr et al., 2015; Samuelson; Stieglitz, 2010; Stotzer, 2009).

The adversity of distress which many transgender individuals face is linked to the adversities faced in society, at school, and/or in the home (Lev, 2004; Mustanski et al., 2016; Ryan, 2011; Stieglitz, 2010). Evidence to date indicates that an adversity-free life for those transgender individuals is a disconfirming concept. Indeed, participants in Grossman and D’Augelli’s (2006) study stated, “There is nothing for transgender youth. Please help” (p. 125). The cumulative victimization transgender youth face throughout their lifetime often leads to mental health risks, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, at higher rates than their peers (Mustanski et al., 2016; Samuelson, 2016). Mustanski et al. (2016) also reported that mental health risks for these youth are intensified through an “accumulation of...stressors.” Moreover, recent research specific to transgender youth found that “trajectories of victimization have significant implications for mental health” and transgender youth are experiencing some of the highest rates of mental illness diagnoses (Mustanski et al., 2016; Samuelson, 2016).

Suicidality is an adversity many transgender youth face, as mentioned in previous sections. Correlations between transgender self-identification and heightened risk for suicidality have been reported (Robinson et al., 2013). However, it is posited that data on suicides, suicide

attempts, and suicide ideation would be much different if transgender students were accepted by society, supported by their families, and felt safe at school (Whitman et al., 2007). The suicide risk data presented by Robinson et al. (2013) suggested that when considering the suicide risk factors of hopelessness and victimization, transgender youth disproportionately reported at higher rates than all other participants. In addition, individuals who have a history of suicide attempt are at risk for future attempts at suicide, where 76.9% of youth reported prior attempts of suicide (Robinson et al., 2013).

For many transgender youth the adversity of passing and not being able to present their gender identity and image of self to the world can cause body dysphoria (Bockting, 1997; Bockting & Coleman, 1993; Zucker & Lawrence, 2009) and/or body dysmorphia (Hepp, Kraemer, Schnyder, Miller & Delsignore, 2005; Lev, 2014) which often leads to other life threatening behaviors, mental health issues, or self harm behaviors (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Stieglitz, 2010). Many adversities may be alleviated for transgender youth through gender identity affirmation (Bockting, 1997; Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007) and/or the use of hormone therapy (Cohen-Kettenis et al., 2008). However, limited support and resources have increased mental health risks, risky lifestyle decisions, and dysphoria for transgender youth, caused by a lack of hope that their gender identity and the self they wish to present would ever align (Whitman et al., 2007).

Experiencing rejection from others in society, at school, and/or in their own home, transgender youth face internal conflicts related to self-worth, loneliness, depression, shame, and other adversities related to their own mental health (Bornstein, 1994; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Robinson et al., 2013). Growing up transgender, Bornstein



(1994) felt that there was something deeply wrong with hir. Ze felt shame related to hir gender identity, and that ze “had some serious defect.” Transgender students have indicated that constant harassment, discrimination, and marginalization has caused low self-esteem and increased their dysphoria (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007; Stieglitz, 2010).

Further, as mentioned in previous subsections, mental health care is not often a viable option for some transgender youth experiencing traumatic mental abuse and trauma (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006). Transgender youth must often face these adversities alone and without any support, which has been reported as causing substance abuse, self harm, thoughts of suicide, and other negative life experiences (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007; Robinson et al., 2013; Stieglitz, 2010; Whitman et al., 2007).

Fear is another common theme related to cumulative adversities and which exists in the literature (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006, 2007; Lev, 2013; Mustanski et al., 2016; Samuelson, 2016; Scheman, 1997; Stieglitz, 2010; Whitman et al., 2007). A major theme in Grossman and D’Augelli’s (2006) study indicated by transgender youth was fear or “vulnerability” (p. 111) as related to their gender identity, which included but was not limited to (a) fear of violence; (b) lack of a place in which they felt comfortable; (c) the risk of suicide; (d) fear of increased aggression, both physical and sexual assault; (e) fear of objectification; (f) fear of being marginalized; and (g) fear of only being seen as transgender or ignored completely. The fear that exists for transgender youth increased their risk of life threatening behaviors, with the youth most at risk youth being those who reported that they did not have family support or peer support (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007; Stieglitz, 2010). In an abstract of a study which reviewed three types of nationwide data on violence against transgender individuals,

Stotzer (2009) wrote, “All three sources indicate that violence against transgender people starts early in life, that transgender people are at risk for multiple types and incidences of violence, and that this threat lasts throughout their lives,” (p. 170). For some transgender individuals, the adversity of fear and vulnerability, due to a lack of support and the threat of possible violence, can be a crippling hurdle, which may lead to additional adversities and barriers listed in this review.

Transgender students have life experiences which have adverse effects on every aspect of their life and throughout their lifetime. Extant studies have revealed that schools are pernicious environments for transgender students and most often it is their transgender identity alone that is reported as the reason for their victimization, abuse, bullying, and harassment while in that learning environment (Greytak et al., 2009; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006, 2007; Lev, 2013; Mustanski et al., 2016; New York State Department, 2015; Rands, 2009; Samuelson, 2016; Scheman, 1997; Singh & Burnes, 2009; Stieglitz, 2010; Whitman et al., 2007). Although limited in quantity and to a small scope of topics, studies that have been conducted specific to transgender students have shown that these youth face adversities not only in their experiences at school, but in every aspect of their life (Greytak et al., 2009). And it is gender, a societal construct, that researchers have attempted to recapitulate as the root cause of all these adversities, negative life experiences, and high levels of catastrophic life trajectories in which many transgender students encounter (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007; Henry & Grubbs, 2016; Robinson et al., 2013; Stieglitz, 2010; Whitman et al., 2007). The life experiences, especially the experience of school, of transgender students are unique, challenging, and full of adversities and often with limited or no support. Furthermore, considering the gender

binary norms of society and understanding the concept of transgender students as outliers, invisible, or even as inhuman, the lack of support for transgender students is not surprising. Therefore, this review of the literature indicates that transgender students often face relentless adversities alone or with limited support, which negatively and/or catastrophically impacts their lives and their trajectories in life. Transgender students need an adult in their corner, to advocate on their behalf.

### **School Counselors Supporting Transgender Students**

The limited research specific to the life experiences of transgender students indicates that all aspects of life for these students are influenced by the societal construct of gender, specifically gender as a binary model. Research specific to the experiences of transgender students in the school environment is minimal, with very few empirical studies having been conducted or published related to this topic. Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous section, the extant literature has revealed that in the school environment, transgender students face severe adversities with limited support. Additionally, existing research has also indicated that school counselors are the most capable school leaders who should advocate for transgender students (Burnes et al., 2010; Field & Baker, 2004; Gonzalez, 2014; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Lewis et al., 2002; Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009; Singh & Burnes, 2009). Field and Baker (2004) posited the following argument, “The professional school counselor is the ideal agent for organizing and leading advocacy efforts on behalf of students. It is time for the school counseling profession as a whole to endorse and embrace a practice advocacy agenda” (p. 131). Moreover, transgender students reported feeling comfortable speaking to school counselors about their needs, experiences, and adversities (Greytak et al., 2009). Considering the life experiences of many

transgender students and their willingness to receive support from school counselors, advocacy on behalf of transgender students appears to be a key duty in the workload of school counselors.

The review of literature related to school counselors and their work with transgender students may be arranged into two related topics: (a) research studies which reveal the type and amount of support students have reported receiving and (b) call for school counselors to serve and develop as advocates for transgender students by professional organizations and researchers.

**Research on supportive school staff.** As noted in prior sections, 39% of transgender students reported hearing school staff making negative comments about gender identity (Greytak et al., 2009). Additionally, upon hearing negative comments about gender expression only 11% of school staff always intervened (Greytak et al., 2009). Moreover, some transgender individuals have also reported being physically and sexually assaulted by school staff while in high school (Grant et al., 2011). The lack of interventions by staff reported by transgender students may also explain why only 14% of transgender students reported being harassed most of the time to school staff. Furthermore, only 33% of transgender students who did report incidents to school staff felt that the interventions and supports were effective (Greytak et al., 2009). The research on staff supportive of transgender students is limited, but the existing data does not indicate a high level of support in general (Greytak et al., 2009; Grossman et al., 2009; McGuire et al., 2010; Sausa, 2005). However, there is data that suggests that transgender students do seek out the support of specific role groups in the school system, especially school counselors (Greytak et al., 2009).

When asked about their comfortability speaking to school staff about transgender-related issues, 54% of transgender students reported that they felt comfortable talking with their school counselor and 46% of transgender students felt comfortable speaking with a teacher (Greytak et

al., 2009). Yet, when asked whom they actually talked to about their issues, transgender students indicated that they talked with teachers 66% of the time and with the school counselor 51% of the time (Greytak et al., 2009). Although there are no studies specific to this contradictory data, the authors indicated that the findings were anticipated due to the limited amount of time students spend with their school counselors (Greytak et al., 2009). Most students (83%) who identify as transgender have indicated that they have at least one adult at school that they feel are supportive (Greytak et al., 2009). However, for some transgender students there is evidence that the one adult they would feel comfortable speaking with about transgender-related issues, the school counselor, does not end up being the person supporting them (Greytak et al., 2009). Not only have students indicated their preference in speaking with school counselors, professional organizations and researchers have called for school counselors to serve as school leaders through advocacy, specifically for transgender students.

**Call for school counselors to advocate.** In their article about school counselors' role in creating safe school climates, Hernandez and Seem (2004) called for school counselors to serve as advocates, writing:

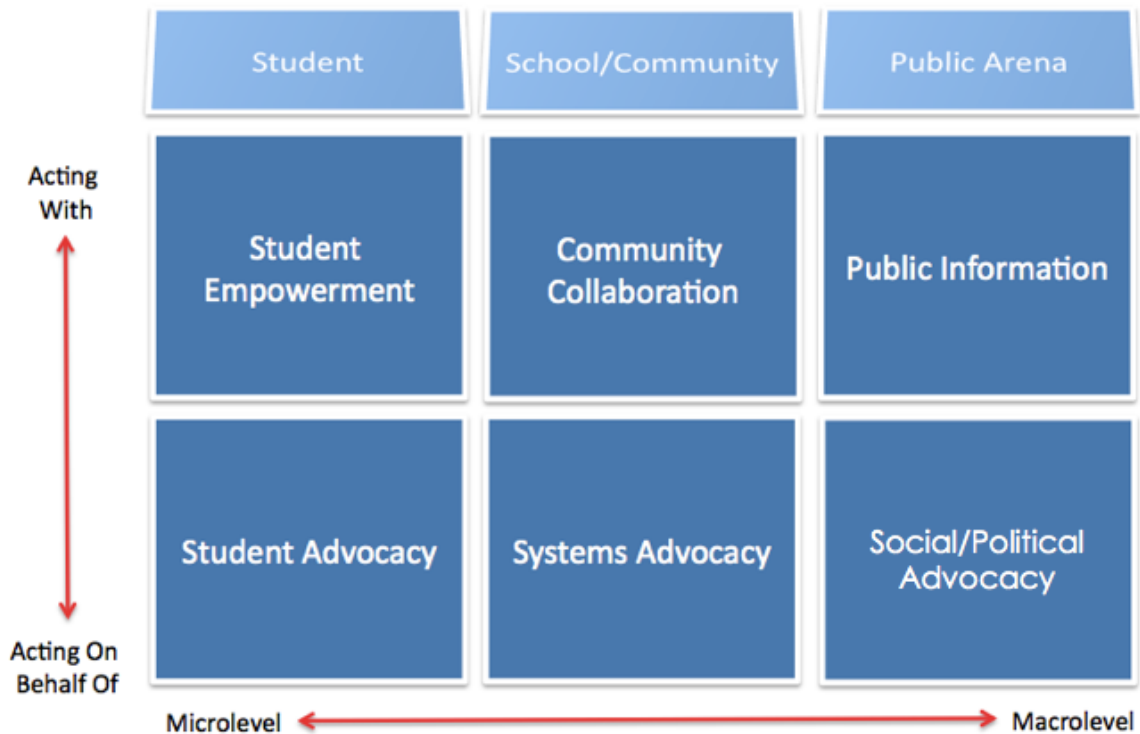
Clearly, school counselors can serve as an epicenter of catalytic change not only with individual students, but also within entire school and community systems. While changing a school climate is everyone's responsibility, school counselors can play a leadership role in this effort because of their specialized knowledge and training. (p. 261)

Situated in an environment that has been shown to be dangerous for transgender students, school counselors have the ability to remove barriers, positively alter trajectories, and reduce adversities specific to these students, which highlights their role as advocate and change agent (Hernandez

& Seem, 2004; Lewis et al., 2002; Bowers & Hatch, 2005; Toporek et al., 2009; Whitman et al., 2007). Both the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), call on all school counselors to serve as leaders through advocacy for all students (Lewis et al., 2002; Bowers & Hatch, 2005; Toporek et al., 2009; Whitman et al., 2007). Whitman et al. (2007) suggested that the ASCA's literature specifically "recognizes the importance of advocacy as one of the school counselor's primary roles" (p. 146). Additionally, Hernandez and Seem (2004) encouraged school counselors to serve as leaders within the school and to create safe and supportive school environments which "will result in the academic and personal success of all students" (p. 261). Consequently, it is the academic and personal successes of transgender students which data have indicated the need for school counselors to serve as advocates.

Adopted by the ACA in March 2003, the work of Lewis et al. (2002) produced a set of advocacy competencies for counselors which provided information, directions, and recommendations on how to develop advocacy skills. Lewis et al.'s (2002) advocacy competencies model consists of six domains that fall under three different intervention levels (see Figure 3). Though there were school counselors serving as advocates prior to the ACA's adoption of the advocacy competencies, it was not until 2003 that school counselors were expected to serve as advocates for students (Toporek et al., 2009). In situations where students face adversities and barriers at school, at home, in the community, or in the general public, school counselors are asked to serve as advocates and change agents along with the student or on behalf of the student (Lewis et al., 2002). In their advocacy competencies, Lewis et al. (2002)

## SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT



*Figure 3.* Model of the ACA Advocacy Competencies. Adopted by ACA in March 2003. The three intervention levels are labeled at the top, situated above the six different advocacy domains. Adopted from “Advocacy Competency Domains” by J. Lewis, M.S. Arnold, R. House, and R. Toporek, 2002.

noted that often the school counselor “is the right person to take leadership” in order to “awaken the general public to macro-systemic issues regarding human dignity” (p. 3). School counselors may need to advocate at the school or the public level, especially if their transgender students facing macrolevel issues or adversities. The school counselor may not only be the right person to advocate on behalf of transgender students, they may in fact be the only adult in transgender students’ lives that will serve as their advocate to protect their human dignity.

Researchers, organizations, and literature related to school counselors’ roles have recommended that school counselors move beyond competency and their traditional roles and into roles of leader, change agent, advocate, and ally specific to serving transgender students

## SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

(Burnes et al., 2010; Gonzalez, 2014; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Goodrich et al., 2013; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Hernandez & Seem, 2004; Israel, 2004; Lewis et al., 2000; Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009; Singh & Burnes, 2009). Existing research has provided data which have evidenced a need for school counselors to serve as advocates for transgender students (Singh & Burnes, 2009). Additionally, both the ACA and the ASCA have adopted frameworks and competencies that call on school counselors to serve as advocates for transgender students (American School Counselor Association, 2005, 2014; Burnes et al., 2010; Lewis et al., 2002). Nevertheless, there are no studies limited to the advocacy work of school counselors specific to transgender students and there is a paucity of research related to the advocacy work of school counselors in general (Gonzalez, 2014). Additionally, the 2017 Annual ASCA Conference, a national conference, offered approximately 200 sessions for training school counselors. The conference offered participants several LGBTQ-specific sessions and a few transgender-specific sessions. The 2017 ACA Conference and Expo, another national conference, offered approximately 400 sessions for school counselors. This conference offered 31 LGBTQ-specific sessions and six transgender-specific sessions and only three transgender-specific sessions at the 2016 ACA Conference and Expo. However, neither of these national conferences designed for school counselors offered a session specific to transgender advocacy development for school counselors.

Whereas students, professional organizations, and authors have called on school counselors to serve as advocates for transgender students, the research literature only provides the single finding that school counselors are not prepared to serve as advocates for transgender students, due to the lack of “proper training on serving the needs of transgender students in a



manner that is culturally competent” (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010, p. 177). The paucity of research specific to school counselors serving as advocates for transgender students causes an absence in trainings, courses, and information in general on the topic. Within the extant literature, the dearth of research connected to transgender students exists in different fields, including research specific to transgender youth, the school experiences of transgender students, school counselor advocacy for transgender youth, and support for transgender students (Gonzalez, 2014). And, given how important the role of school counselor is to transgender students, empirical research specific to school counselor advocacy related to this group of students is nonexistent (Henry & Grubbs, 2016). Still, some researchers continue to posit that schools are “failing miserably” in their responsibilities to transgender students (Rands, 2009, p. 422). In order to bridge the existing gaps, research must focus on how school counselors advocate for transgender students (Gonzalez, 2014; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Toporek et al., 2009).

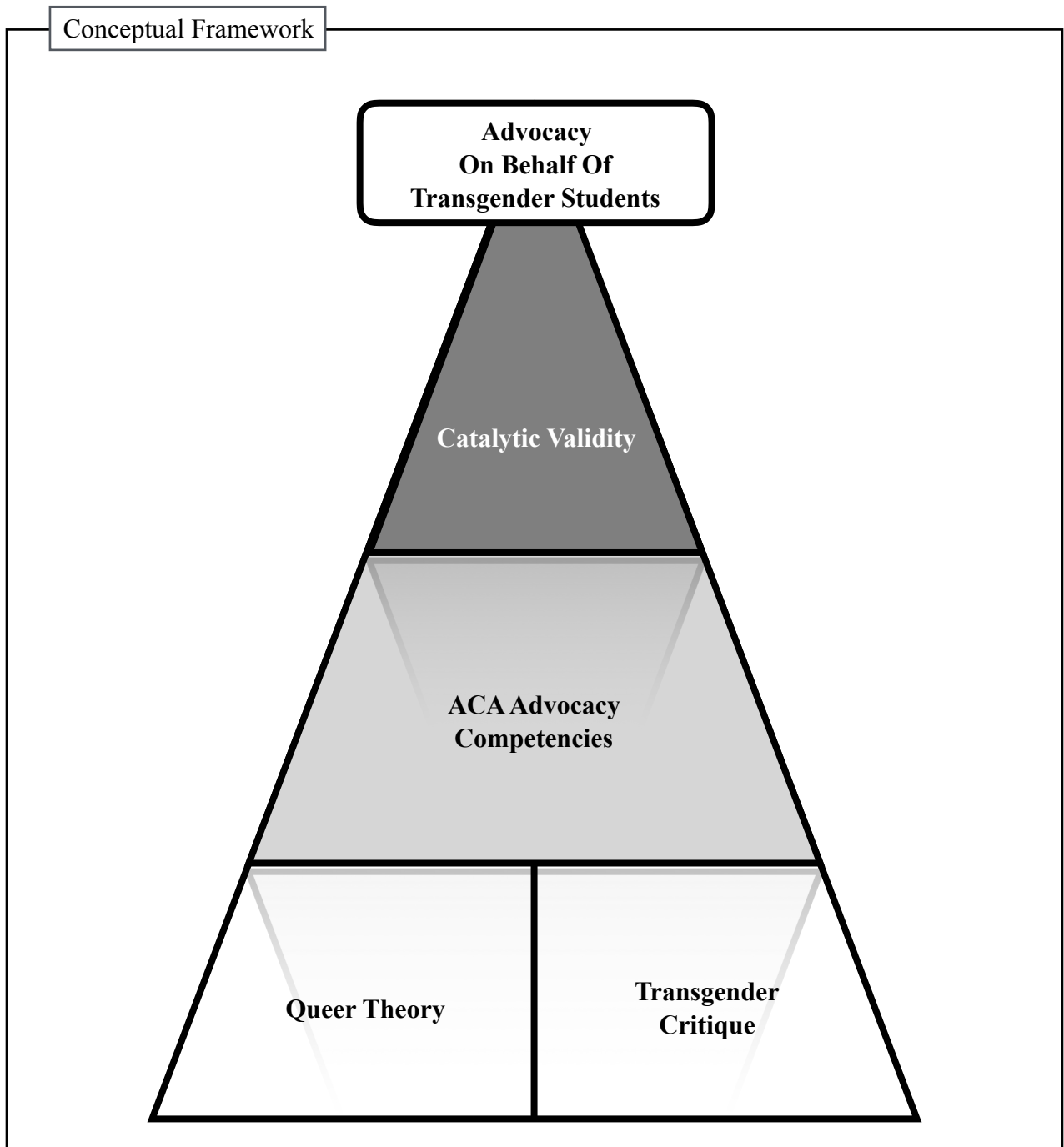
Central to school counselors becoming advocates and making positive systemic change for transgender students is their ability to embrace the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis et al., 2002), specifically the competencies that fall under the systems advocacy domain (Gonzalez, 2014; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009; Toporek et al., 2009). On systems advocacy, Lewis et al. (2002) wrote, when adversities negatively effect “students’ development,” school counselors often “wish that they could change the environment” (p. 2). In order for school counselors to positively change their environment to a safe and welcoming school for transgender students, the systems advocacy level of the ACA Advocacy Competencies must be reached (Lewis et al., 2002). According to Lopez-Baez and Paylo (2009), another

essential point is that school counselors serving as transgender advocates may also need to address the adversities and issues faced by transgender students in their community, family, or any other system the student may belong. The systems negatively effected for transgender students, as presented in this literature review, may include one or more systems and one or more adversities or barriers. Consequently, in order to support school counselors accepting the call to serve as advocates for transgender students, an exploration of this process is required (Gonzalez, 2014; Lewis et al., 2002; Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Queer theory (Butler, 1990), trans critique (Stryker, 2004), and the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis et al., 2002) collectively formed the foundation of the conceptual framework, from which this literature review and subsequent study were explored. Queer theory provided a queer perspective on the pervasiveness of society's gender binaries, which influences the experiences of school counselors and their ability to support transgender students. The explorative nature of the study was influenced by the trans critique lens, as were the formation and revisions of research questions and the review of literature. The ACA Advocacy Competencies grounded the study in school counselor advocacy development and influenced the research design. Lather's (1991) concept of catalytic validity moved the study beyond the theoretical and conceptual, toward authentic advocacy on behalf of transgender students. The conceptual framework is detailed in Figure 4.

The paucity of research specific to school counselors developing as transgender advocates also meant a paucity of related theories. Therefore, queer theory and trans critique provided the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis dialectic spiral approach to the study, which served



*Figure 4.* Conceptual framework schematic. Adapted from J. Butler's (1990) *Queer Theory*, S. Stryker's (2004) *Trans Critique of Queer Theory*, J. Lewis, M. S. Arnold, R. House, & R. Toporek's (2002) *Advocacy Competencies for school counselors*, and Lather's (1991) concept of catalytic validity.

as the groundwork for this exploratory study (Adorno, 2017). The discourse and conflict between queer theory and the trans critique literature provided a conceptual framework model with a focus on exploration and authentic advocacy.

**Queer theory.** The argument behind queer theory is that the person, or self, is only an effect of performance regulated by societal norms (Butler, 1990). Central to queer theory is the concept of personal identities as performances or expressions, not who one is: identities are the effect of a performance and one's "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1990, p. 34). Therefore, gender is a construct of society and we perform gender and expressions associated with gender, which constitutes the queer theory thesis represented in the conceptual framework.

Expanding the work of Foucault (1978), Butler (1999) amplified the idea of gender as binary and as a social construct, and posited that "because certain kinds of 'gender identities' fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain" (p. 24). It is society that influences gender performance and gender conformity (Butler, 1999). Society controls, forms, and constructs the identities of who we are, and by placing the utmost importance on gender and sexuality, society has predetermined our essence based on whether we are male or female, regardless of the individual or individual preferences (Butler, 1999; Foucault, 1978). Societal institutions, such as religion, government, school, and the family are all, therefore, subject to the social constructs and constraints developed around gender. Those who are born into society and who do not correspond to the societal constructs or norms, in terms of gender, are seen as intruders, strange, and different. Deviating from the norm is seen as a threat to the social construct of gender, as

well as a threat to the all the institutions within society (Foucault, 1978). Furthermore, Ehrensaft (2011) described the current reality transgender youth face, writing, “a set of beliefs and practices that derive from the assumption that there are only two genders and that those who stray from their assigned gender boxes, male or female, are to be challenged, chastised, or cajoled toward normativity” (p. 529). Within the social constructs of gender, a premium is offered to those that adhere to the constructs and norms that exist, while those pursuing a variant perspective on gender are persuaded to accept the norms as actuality (Butler, 1999; Ehrensaft, 2011; Foucault, 1978).

Citing the work of Foucault (1978) and Butler (1990), Shaw and Lee (2004) have explained their version of queer theory in these terms:

...gender is so central in shaping our lives, much of what is gendered we do not even recognize; it's made normal and ordinary and occurs on a subconscious level... the differences between “femininity”... and “masculinity”... are made to seem natural and inevitable despite the fact that gender is a social script that individuals learn. (pp. 107-108)

Most people willingly adhere to the social constructs of gender, explained Lorber (1994), “...because the norms and expectations get built into their sense of worth and identity as (the way we) think” (p. 128). Gender is actively learned throughout the child’s development, just as any other skill is learned (Shaw & Lee, 2004). Girls and boys are trained to talk, walk, think, etc. the same way as their gender-corresponding parent, until there are two very different kinds of humans created by the societal constructs of gender (Shaw & Lee, 2004). Queer theory recognizes that learned gender behaviors and practices are simply performances, acts, a human

production, created by society and dependent on gender being done by everyone, constantly (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978; Lorber 1994; Shaw & Lee, 2004; Sullivan, 2014). Moreover, some researchers, such as Gagne and Tewksbury (1998), have posited that individuals who develop non-binary gender identities, such as transgender students, “challenge and destabilize the binary system of gender, while simultaneously and inadvertently reinforcing it as an institution” (p. 83). In order to make change at the macro level, transgender advocates must be able to “disrupt the foundations that cover over alternative cultural configurations of gender” (p. 201) or make “gender trouble” (p. vii) collaboratively and on behalf of their transgender students (Butler, 1990).

**Trans critique.** Given the paucity of literature and research specific to transgender individuals, there remains limited amounts of seminal scholarship which has led to individuals voicing their opinions and critiques, most often in nonacademic forums. The trans critique was developed through the work of transgender individuals who attempted to shift transgender studies from “the shadow of queer theory” (Stryker, 2004). Although researchers who subscribe to queer theory have continued to produce literature specific to the transgender movement, “often *queer* remains a code word for ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian,’ and all too often transgender phenomena are misapprehended through a lens that privileges sexual orientation and sexual identity as the primary means of differing from heteronormativity” (Stryker, 2004, p. 131). Central to the trans critique is the inaccurate or misinterpreted redefinition of gender by queer theorists, such as Butler (1990) (Stryker, 2004). Therefore, gender is essential, and not simply a performance, to the transgender identity, which constitutes the trans critique antithesis represented in the conceptual framework.

The trans critique is often abruptly critical and at times contains “angry content” directed at queer theory and queer theorists (Serano, 2013, p. 35). Serano (2013) recalled a scolding performance of the poem “Fuck You” by spoken word artist Carolyn Connelly, which was directed at queer theory: “...Fuck Post Modernism/Fuck Gender Studies/Fuck Judith Butler/Fuck theory that isn’t by and for and speaks to real people...” (p. 35). Through the lens of the trans critique, Queer Theory is viewed as being too theoretical, too difficult to understand, and incorrect in its interpretation of gender. Moreover, according to Stryker (2008), the trans critique of Queer Theory has historically directed much of its attention and animosity towards Judith Butler, incorrectly interpreting her concept of gender performativity as the idea “that gender is merely a performance and therefore not real” (Stryker, 2008). According to Stryker (2008), within queer theory many scholars presented gender as merely an act and not reality, which undermines gender identity, which is essential to transgender individuals who:

...often suffered a great deal to actualize for others the reality of their gender identities, the idea that gender was just a game of sorts, with a wardrobe full of possible gender costumes to be put on or taken off at will, felt galling. But that was actually never Butler’s point (p. 131).

Nevertheless, the trans critique has contributed to the literature by highlighting the underrepresented perspectives of transgender individuals, causing a redefinition of gender, and providing a lens which to view literature and research.

**ACA Advocacy Competencies.** In response to the calls for school counselors to serve as advocates, ACA adopted the ACA Advocacy Competencies in 2003, a practical framework that reinforced the call to advocacy (Gonzalez, 2014; Lewis et al., 2002; Ratts & Hutchins, 2009;

Toporek et al., 2009). Ratts et al., (2007) posited that by using the ACA Advocacy Competencies framework as a tool for advocacy development, school counselors are able to advocate on behalf of students, “promoting access and equity for all students” (p. 90). Additionally, in regards to the need of school counselors to serve as advocates, Ratts and Hutchins (2009) wrote, “Counselors can meet the growing need to expand their roles to include advocacy by using the ACA Advocacy Competencies” (p. 269). By adopting these advocacy competencies in 2003, ACA moved the discussions and calls to action by researchers to an actionable framework for professional school counselors (Lewis et al., 2002; Ratts, 2009; Ratts et al., 2007).

The ACA Advocacy Competencies model (see Figure 3) is a matrix of three levels of advocacy by two levels of school counselor involvement (Lewis et al., 2002). The three levels of advocacy in the matrix are the (1) microlevel or client/student advocacy, (2) mesolevel or school/community advocacy, and (3) macrolevel or public arena advocacy (Lewis et al., 2002). The two levels of school counselor involvement are (1) acting with and (2) acting on behalf. The matrix contains the following six domains which constitute the framework of school counselor advocacy: (1) client/student empowerment, (2) client/student advocacy, (3) community collaboration, (4) systems advocacy, (5) public information, and (6) social/political advocacy (Lewis et al., 2002). The ACA Advocacy Competencies framework and six domains is provided in Appendix B. The ACA Advocacy Competencies were designed to provide a differentiated framework and support to school counselors incorporating advocacy into their professional roles (Lewis et al., 2002; Ratts 2009). Consequently, school counselors have a greater impact on removing the barriers and adversities facing transgender students in their schools if they work out of all six domains (Lewis et al., 2002; Ratts 2009; Ratts et al., 2007).



## SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

Lewis and Bradley (2000) argued:

Advocacy is an important aspect of every counselor's role. Regardless of the particular setting in which she or he works, each counselor is confronted again and again with issues that cannot be resolved simply through change within the individual. All too often, negative aspects of the environment impinge on a [student's] well-being, intensifying personal problems or creating obstacles to growth. When such situations arise, effective counselors speak up! (p. 3)

Given the numerous adversities faced by transgender students in every aspect of society and the lack of adult support, transgender students need school counselors to advocate with them and on their behalf. Moreover, Bailey, Getch, and Chen-Hayes (2003) cautioned "Students need an advocate who will recognize when student needs are not being heard or met and when they are being squashed emotionally and intellectually by the very system designed to enhance their emotional, physical, and intellectual well-being" (p. 420). If school counselors have been determined to take on the role of advocates for transgender students, then the ACA Advocacy Competencies is the framework designed to support the advocacy development of school counselors, so that transgender students are able to thrive, not just in school, but in life.

**Catalytic validity.** The concept of catalytic validity was added to the conceptual framework in order to provide relevance to the study for the school counselors, in the form of authentic advocacy for their transgender students (Lather, 1986, 1991). The catalytic validity focus of the study provided a framework for advocacy and social justice research.

### **Summary**

The call for school counselors to serve as advocates for transgender students is evident, but a lack of research on the school experiences of transgender students in general and an absence of literature specific to school counselor advocacy specific to transgender students has thus far produced insufficient progress in regards to how school counselors develop as advocates for transgender students. Lewis et al.'s (2002) advocacy competencies offer a framework to explore how school counselors develop as transgender advocates. Additionally, the framework provides a practical advocacy tool that will actually make a difference in the lives of transgender students while conducting an exploratory study. Anchored in Queer Theory's (Butler, 1990) argument of the consequences of the pervasiveness of gender binaries in our society and through the demanding lens of the trans critique (Stryker, 2004) of Queer Theory, this study will explore how three school counselors participating in an inquiry group develop as transgender advocates. Using the ACA Advocacy Competencies to guide individual passion projects designed to address issues facing transgender students, this exploratory research hopes to discover advocacy development that positively alters the life trajectories of transgender students.

### **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

The experiences of transgender students in the school environment are often reported to be difficult and at times traumatic (GLSEN, 2007; Greytak et al., 2009; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006, 2007; Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Mustanski et al., 2016; Rands, 2009; Robinson et al., 2013; Samuelson, 2016; Scheman, 1997; Singh & Burnes, 2009; Whitman et al. 2007).). However, research has indicated that support by a school staff member, specifically school counselors, reduces the negative experiences these students face (Greytak et al., 2009; Wimberly, 2015b). Moreover, researchers and professional organizations have started calling on school counselors to move beyond basic support; school counselors are asked to serve as advocates for transgender (Burnes et al., 2010; Gonzalez, 2014; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Goodrich et al., 2013; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Hernandez & Seem, 2004; Israel, 2004; Lewis et al., 2000; Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009; Singh & Burnes, 2009; Toporek et al., 2009). The purpose of this research study was to explore school counselor advocacy development as it relates to transgender students. The study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. How do three school counselors participating in a professional inquiry group develop as advocates for transgender students?
2. What does this advocacy afford school counselors?
3. What are the limitations faced by school counselors developing as transgender advocates?

This chapter provides the details of my qualitative research study's methodology. Specially discussed are the relationships formed with participants and gatekeepers, the selection

of participants and site, the collection of data, and the analysis of the data collected (Maxwell, 2013). Also presented in this chapter is a rationale for qualitative research, a brief overview of the study, the research sample, and the research design. Finally, the strategies implemented in an attempt to increase validity are discussed.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research**

Due to nonexistent prior research on this study's topic, this study was exploratory in nature, which is best informed by qualitative data (Maxwell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Qualitative data affords researchers an opportunity to acquire advantageous information to explanatory questions concerning human development (Miles et al., 2014). In order to holistically understand the advocacy development of school counselors, I needed to enter the participants world and explore, a core feature of qualitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). Through collaborative participation I was able to serve as an expert and develop complex relationships with the school counselors, which yielded rich data (Maxwell, 2013). In addition, the rich data collected during this study strengthened the validity of the study through the use of triangulation. Finally, since this study explored the processes related to advocacy development of school counselors in a specific context, qualitative research was the most effective approach to collect the required data (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014).

The complexities and nuances of the case, the contexts of each school counselor, and the richness of the exchanges which occurred during the study would have been difficult to capture using quantitative methods (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Creswell (2013) posited that we conduct qualitative research and methodology “because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue” and those complex and nuanced details “can only be established by

talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work” and providing opportunities for the participants to tell their stories and contexts (p. 48). The uniqueness, complexity, and richness of the participants and their contexts would not be captured using statistical means, making qualitative research the best approach to answer the research questions of this study (Creswell, 2013).

### **Research Design**

Grounded in Maxwell’s (2013) interactive approach to research design, this study remained iterative and flexible during all aspects, including the study’s proposal, literature review and conceptual framework design, study design development, data collection, and data analysis. My research questions remained at the heart of the study, however they appeared to be the most influenced component of the research design. My study’s conceptual framework, goals, methods, and validity each directly influenced the research questions at one point or another. For example, while in the field collecting data from participants (methods), the assumptions (validity) I brought into the study were challenged, which altered research questions. The research design of this study underwent many adjustments throughout the study, informed by the interactions between the different components of research design (Maxwell, 2013). Figure 5 is a visual representation of the research design map for this study.

Given that my main research question was focused on discovering how a “social phenomenon works” with a specific group of people within a specific site requiring “an extensive description,” an embedded case study design was selected (Yin, 2014, p. 4). In order to research the phenomenon of school counselor transgender advocacy development within an inquiry group setting, detailed and intimate data collection from three school counselors

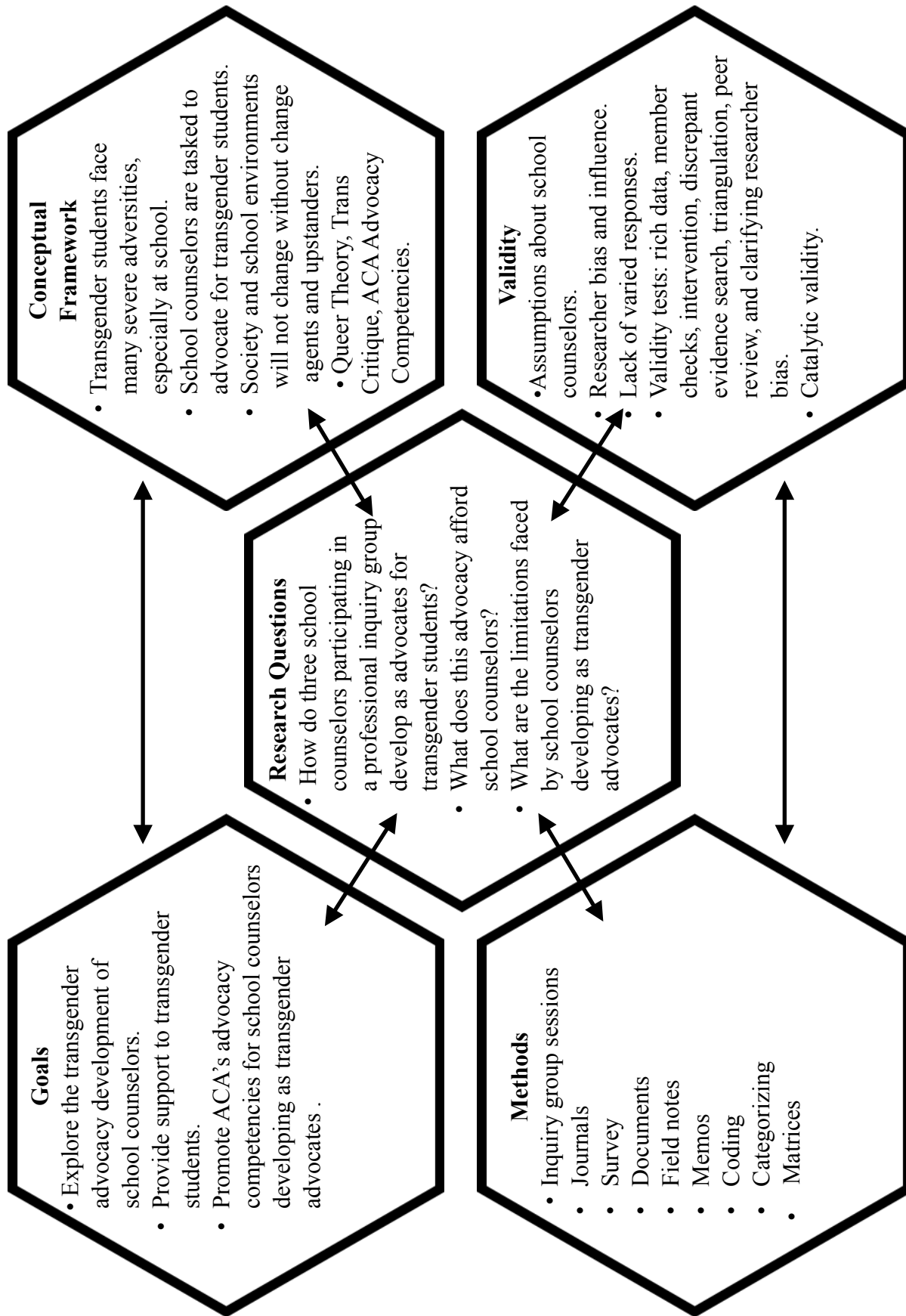


Figure 5. Research design map interactive model. The design map features five interrelated components which interact with each other. Adapted from “Qualitative research design: An interactive approach,” by J. A. Maxwell. Copyright 2013 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

participating in the study was required. Moreover, the embedded case study design also provided an appropriate structure to collect data on a case with multiple experiences within a real-world setting (Yin, 2014). Finally, due to the lack of empirical research data and professional development on the advocacy development of school counselors specific to transgender students, Maxwell (2014) contends that “the case study is therefore worth conducting because the descriptive informant alone will be revelatory,” (p. 52). Therefore, it was anticipated that this study would reveal how school counselors develop as advocates for transgender students.

### **Research Sample**

In order to explore advocacy development of school counselors related to working with transgender students, I collaborated with three participants who represented the single case with multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2014). Crucial case sampling was the sampling strategy utilized in this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). I sampled individual school counselors based on their commitment to improving professionally as it related to supporting transgender students. It was crucial to this study’s research questions to sample school counselors ready to embark on advocacy development specific to transgender students.

**Access and informed consent.** In accordance with the Bellarmine University and the school district’s policies, this study followed Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols, including submitting required IRB paperwork. After permission to recruit middle and high school counselors was granted by the school district, a recruitment flyer (see Appendix C), which included my contact information, was provided to middle and high school counselors via the district’s lead school counselor. Three school counselors (two at the high school level and one at the middle school level) were selected to participate based on their interest in learning more

about supporting transgender students and their willingness to meet as an inquiry group. All three participants were provided and signed informed consent forms.

**Rationale for site and participant selection.** The setting of this study was a large urban school district in southeast United States. This site was selected due to several factors, including (a) the district's progressive LGBTQ stance, (b) the district's large number of school counselors, (c) access to several key gatekeepers, and (d) accessibility to meeting rooms (Maxwell, 2013). Crucial to this exploratory study was selecting school counselors who were interested in improving their advocacy work on behalf of transgender students, which resulted in crucial case sampling usage (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

The three school counselors selected as participants were eager to work in a collaborative inquiry group focused on advocating for transgender students. For confidentiality purposes, all participants' names were substituted with the following pseudonyms: Catherine, Dorothy, and Rose. Catherine is a school counselor for high school students in a school with 680 students in elementary, middle, and high school. Dorothy serves as a school counselor for sixth graders in a middle school with 1,350 students. Rose is a school counselor at a school with 130 middle and high school students. With regard to gender identity, sexuality, and race all three participants identified as cisgender, heterosexual, and white. Whereas diversity among the participants was lacking, diversity of students was robust in each school, including students who identify as LGBTQ. Moreover, in communications prior to being selected for the study, all three candidates committed to working in an inquiry group focused on supporting transgender students.

**Participant researcher.** My experiences in life as an LGBTQ individual coupled with a desire to be an effective change agent have led me to the development of the boundaries of this



case. I examined and explored the extant research related to queer topics, searching for an urgent need that I felt compelled to address through scholarship. After an extensive review of literature, I emerged determined to fill gaps found in the research specific to school counselors supporting transgender students.

As an active and collaborative partner in this study and the subsequent inquiry group, not only did I serve as the research instrument, I also served as another participant (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). As a participant researcher, I facilitated and fully participated in the inquiry group discussions and tasks, including the completion of a project to present to all the high school counselors with the other presenters (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, as a participant researcher my conversations, writings, field notes, reflections, and memos influenced the study, during the design on the research study, data collection, and data analysis (Maxwell, 2013).

Every time I assessed my own identity and the goals I brought to this study, I followed Maxwell's (2013) advice and comparatively examined my experiences, thoughts, emotions, and assumptions with my research. By conducting this examination throughout the study, I was able to manage my roles as researcher, research participant, change agent, and member of the LGBTQ community. Moreover, this process guided my study in a reflexive manner, allowing the research design to be reconstructed continuously (Maxwell, 2013).

Following the advice of Maxwell (2013) regarding qualitative research, I designed my research to be interactive and I committed myself to being reflexive throughout the study. I entered the study with the assumption that school counselors who would volunteer for the study as participants would need training at the basic level of transgender knowledge and support.

Following the first session, I reviewed the data, reflected on the experience, and scrutinized the

assumptions I held. What emerged from this reflexive process, was a shift in the research design from basic training for school counselors to a focus on developing school counselors as transgender advocates.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The research questions, literature review, conceptual framework, and goals guided this research study and its methods. And though my research design underwent several reconstructions through an interaction among all its components, the methods plan, including data collection, was developed after the first attempts of developing the research questions and conceptual framework, as well as the goals of the study. Every component of my research design was altered at least once in some manner during the research study, including methods and data collection.

In this section, I will describe each of my study's data collection methods and the changes made to these methods as the study developed. In an attempt to ensure the ability to effectively analyze data and in order to provide a robust description of the study, my research design included seven data collection methods: (1) inquiry groups, (2) journals, (3) field notes, (4) memos, (5) documents, (6) participant presentations, and (7) demographic survey.

**Inquiry group.** The use of an inquiry group was one of the main sources of data for the study. Four inquiry group sessions were conducted over a five-month period, to which the three participants agreed. At the first session, the group agreed upon the meeting dates of the remaining sessions. The three school counselors and I worked collaboratively in a group, guided by agendas I set based on the research design and inquiry group work, a set of questions and prompts I designed prior to each session, and the advocacy work and passion projects we were

each working on. Although an agenda was provided for each session, the school counselors were given freedom to discuss related items, seek support from one another, and share examples and tips, and to reflect on developing as an advocate for transgender students. I recorded the four inquiry group sessions on my laptop using a directional external microphone. For the audio recording of each inquiry group session, I reviewed the audio recordings, had them professionally transcribed, and I reviewed all of the transcriptions. The transcriptions of these inquiry group sessions served as one component of my study's dataset. Additionally, during the first inquiry group session the school counselors were provided a hard copy of a guide specific for people wishing to support transgender individuals, which contained chapters on transgender-specific terminology and language, including a list of key words; culture; and experiences.

The work of the inquiry group served as a catalyst for each participant's development as a transgender advocate. The participants were tasked to think about their reality in terms of issues faced by transgender students, within their own schools, and then transform that reality in a manner that is more supportive for transgender students (Blackburn, 2001; Lather, 1991). Within the inquiry group, we termed our reality transformation efforts as passion projects. The passion project idea was introduced in order to provide the participants a vehicle for their advocacy development and a conscientious application of transformation (Lather, 1991). Through individual conversations and conversations during the second session of the inquiry group, the three school counselors were informed about our focus on passion projects, however the official announcement was sent to the participants via email after the second session:

NEW: As part of your great work, we are each choosing a passion project to use at our schools. What is needed in terms of supporting transgender at your school? One

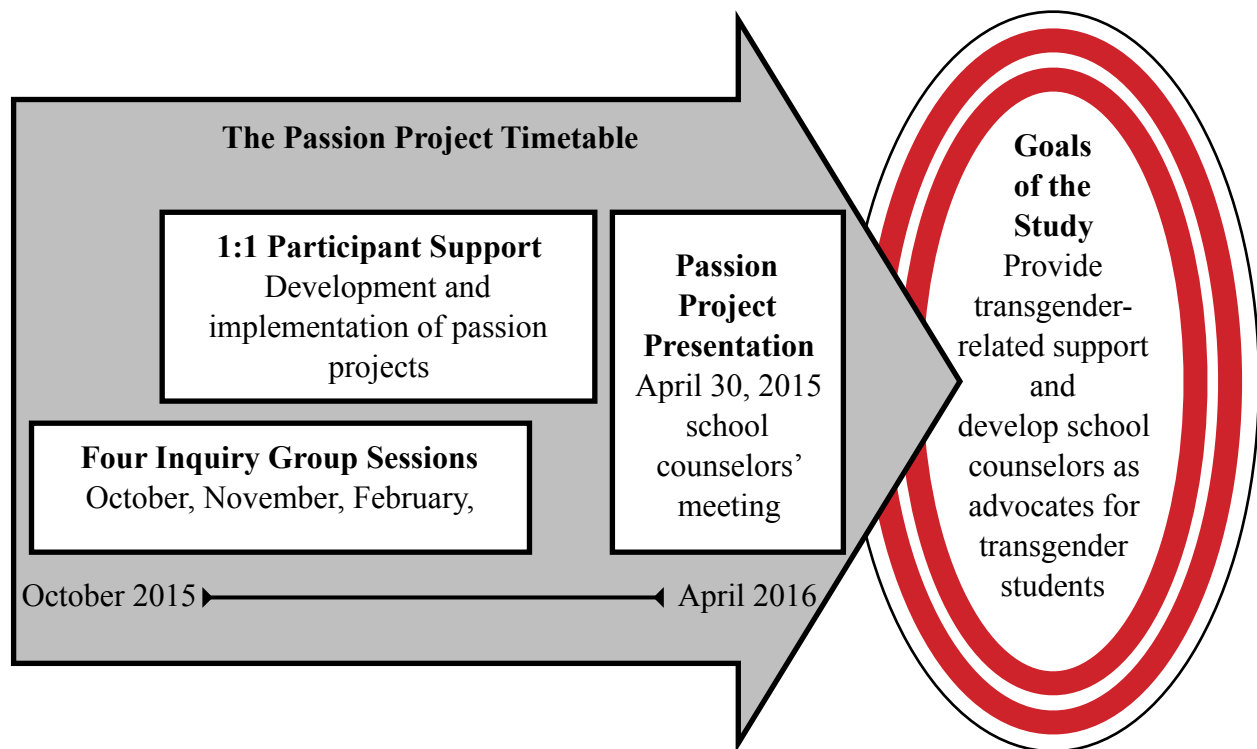
## SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

counselor is thinking training for staff, another is thinking Infinite Campus document, and others are thinking transitioning to college. I am available to visit you at your school at any time to support you in this advocacy project. And as a wonderful bonus, this awesome group of counselors will present our resources to all the school counselors at the March counselors' meeting. Basically, you are sharing your passion project (training you provided your staff, resource, handout etc.).

Again, I am available via email or I can swing by your school to help plan any of this. You will also be sharing your ideas at the next meeting...February 1. This is a PASSION project...something that you truly feel excited about doing related to your students who identify as transgender or may identify as transgender. (Personal communication, December 1, 2015).

Remaining reflexive and following Maxwell (2013) led to the addition of passion projects to the study, which afforded the participants an experience that was meaningful, motivational, and transformational and afforded me an opportunity to support school counselors' development as transgender advocates through a passion project (see Figure 6).

**Journals.** All participants agreed to journal during the inquiry group sessions and were invited to journal on their own if they felt inclined to do so. During the first session, I attempted to have participants journal in a notebook, with white lined paper. They were asked to journal throughout the first session whenever they had a thought, comment, idea, question, etc. I also verbally provided participants questions and prompts to journal about during the session, such as, "What are the biggest issues surrounding transgender students?" Immediately following the first session, I decided to provide participants journaling forms for the three remaining sessions to



*Figure 6.* Adjusted research design model. Model of the research design showing the adjustments made in November 2015.

encourage answers related to the questions in which I wanted data and because the participants did not utilize the free form journaling while engaged in the inquiry group discussions. I designed the journaling forms with prompts and questions which would serve as springboards for discussion, provide thought-provoking reflection opportunities, and guide the inquiry group's conversations. During sessions, participants were provided time to write their responses to the questions posed in their journaling forms. An example of a journaling form can be found in Appendix I. The more structured journaling forms and schedule not only produced more journal writing, this change also created a naturally organized data collection system. It is important to note that often times the journaling questions and/or prompts were discussed thoroughly by each participant during the discussion and captured on the audio recorder. The journaling of all

participants was compiled into a digital document, which serves as the second component of my study's dataset.

Journaling was included as a data collection method in order to provide an alternative manner in which to collect the information from each school counselor. While each participant had ample time to share and speak during inquiry group discussions, only one person spoke at a time during these conversations. Journaling afforded all participants an opportunity to be asked a specific question or prompt and then we could all answer it simultaneously. Journaling also allowed school counselors to write responses without being influenced by each others' responses. For example, on the final journaling form participants were asked to list three words which described their experience in the inquiry group. I was able to collect information from each school counselor which was not influenced by others in the inquiry group using the journals. I provided the school counselors with the fifth journal form via email, which they completed prior to the final celebratory meeting, where the forms were collected.

Journal prompts and questions focused mainly on the school counselors' experiences related to their inquiry group participation, transgender advocacy development, passion projects, and daily experiences within their schools. A comprehensive list of journal prompts and questions is included in Appendix D.

**Field notes.** The third data collection method utilized during this study was the collection of field notes, both handwritten and typed. Field notes were written following inquiry group sessions, after visiting with a school counselor, after the participants presented at the districtwide school counselor meeting, and after the final celebratory meeting. Immediately following all four inquiry sessions, I jotted field notes in the professional library. Supporting passion project work,

I met with Catherine and her principal at her school once and I met with Rose multiple times at her school. Field notes were jotted during and after the meetings with the school counselors when I met with them at their schools. And after Catherine, Rose, and I presented our work at the districtwide school counselor meeting and following the celebratory meeting with all participants, I jotted field notes in my car as well as when I arrived home. My field notes were converted into formal write-ups, allowing me to expand on the notes and abbreviations, including data that I remembered but failed to write in the original field notes (Miles et al., 2014).

**Documents.** In addition to the journaling by the participants and myself, other documents were collected as part of the dataset for this study, including texts shared in inquiry groups, participant passion project documents, emails, notes on chart paper created by the inquiry group, and public documents such as agendas, minutes, and flyers (Creswell, 2013). These documents were collected at different times during the study, however this component of data collection became more substantial upon the decision to shift the study's focus to the school counselors' advocacy development through passion projects. Documents collected from each school counselor varied based upon their passion project and their passion project work. For Catherine, documents such as emails and policies related to her school's restroom use policy were collected. Documents collected from Dorothy were related to the culture of her school, including artwork her students created specific to gender identity, which she was involved in. Of the three school counselors, more documents were collected from Rose, including several emails, presentation and supplemental handouts, and data from a survey she sent out to her staff. Rose's passion project required that she and I collaborate more than the other two school counselors. The

inclusion of documents as one of the data collection methods in my research design provided another layer of data for analysis.

**Participant presentation.** A major research design shift which occurred during the study was the addition of passion projects for each participant and a presentation of these projects by the inquiry group at a districtwide school counselor meeting. Each participant selected an advocacy project to work on specific to the needs of transgender students. The inquiry group served as a support for this work. Additionally, I offered my time to each school counselor outside the inquiry group as an added layer of support. Passion projects and the work of the inquiry group were presented to their colleagues at a districtwide school counselor meeting.

This reconstruction of the research design occurred after data analysis from the first inquiry session revealed that the assumptions I held were incorrect. Whereas most of the general population, including most school counselors, have limited knowledge and experience supporting transgender students, the three participants in this research study were beyond the basic level of support established in the original research design. As part of the reconstruction of the research design, the level of support and the goals of the inquiry group were shifted towards advocacy development. I posed this new approach to our group and all three of the participants were eager to work on their own project, with support from the group and myself. All participants positively accepted the idea of presenting their project and advocacy work during a districtwide school counselor meeting. I was able to secure a spot on the agenda for one of the school counselors' meetings using my main gatekeeper with the district.

The three school counselors and I selected differing advocacy work and passion projects, based on the needs of the students we were working with and advocacy level. The four passion



projects were: (a) Catherine introduced a policy to the school's decision making body which supported the needs of transgender students; (b) Dorothy focused on developing a welcoming and safe climate for the transgender students; (c) Rose developed district-level training and staff support specific to the rights of transgender individuals; and (d) Jack developed ally stickers for district staff to wear on their name badges. These advocacy projects are addressed in further detail in the next chapter.

**Demographic survey.** During the data analysis phase of the study I realized that I did not have demographic data self-reported by the school counselors and that I could only assume demographic information. Therefore, I asked participants to complete a short survey in order to collect some basic demographic data. Seven questions collected data on the constructs of (a) number of years served as a school counselor, (b) number of years in public education, (c) number of years working for the district, (d) school's classification/description, (e) gender identity, (f) race/ethnicity, and (g) degrees, licenses, and certifications held. The data from the questions on gender identity and race/ethnicity provided a more accurate case profile, so that I did not have to rely on my assumptions.

### **Data Analysis and Synthesis**

Collecting data using multiple methods has different purposes in qualitative research, including the triangulation and to expand the aspects of the phenomena being studied (Maxwell, 2013). The multiple methods of data collection utilized in this study are identified in the methods component of the research design map (see Figure 5). Data analysis was integral to the research design and purposefully informed and was informed by the other rest of the research design (Maxwell, 2013). Systematically planned as part of the research design, data collection and data

analysis occurred simultaneously throughout the study. This process of data analysis is ongoing from the start of data collection, through writing field notes and memos, during transcription stages, multiple times during Creswell's (2013) "data analysis spiral" (see Figure 7), as well as during the construction of this dissertation. During inquiry group sessions I audio recorded the conversations, which were then converted into transcriptions. Additionally, immediately following the inquiry group sessions I wrote field notes and memos to document observations, emerging themes, research design issues, and my own assumptions and interpretations. Journaling opportunities and surveys added another layer of data and data analysis. As data was collected, it was immediately analyzed, constantly informing the research design (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).

The management of this study's data was systematic, to ensure confidentiality and organization. The digital audio recordings, transcripts, memos, field notes, and documents were saved as password-encrypted files. Hardcopies of my data corpus were stored in a locked cabinet and organized by data type, codes, and themes. This study's data corpus was organized in such a way to support the continuous data analysis as determined by the research design and the qualitative nature of the study (Maxwell, 2013; Creswell, 2013).

I followed the advice of Maxwell (2013), Miles et al. (2014), and Saldaña (2013) on memoing by making it a priority to memo immediately upon having an idea related to my study, including both field work and conceptual framework reflections, and allowing memos to be rapid and free-flowing in nature. Throughout the entire data analysis phase of the study, I adhered to Saldana's (2013) recommendation to immediately stop whatever I was doing and write analytic memos "whenever *anything* related to and significant about the coding or analysis of the data"

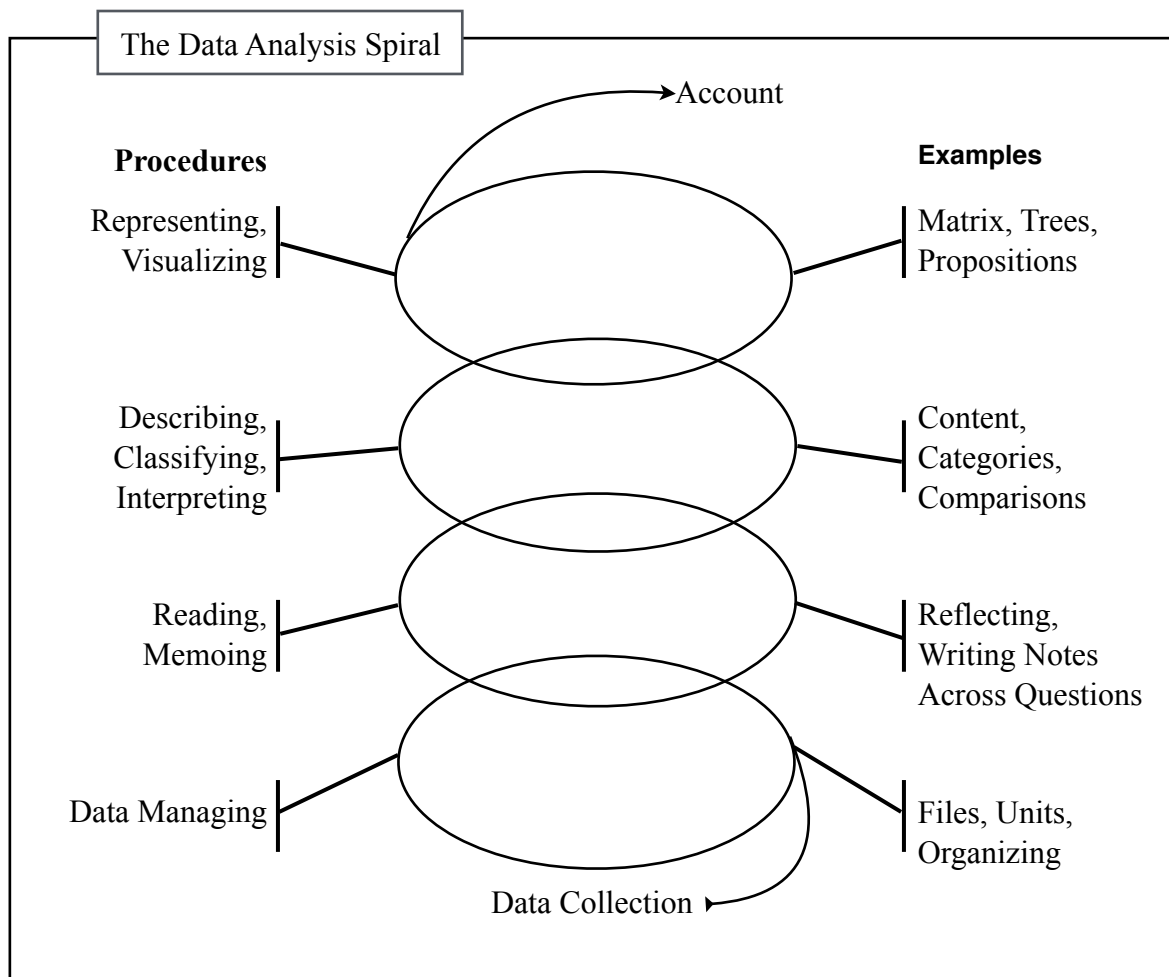


Figure 7. The data analysis spiral. Adapted from “Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design,” by J.W. Creswell p. 183. Copyright 2013 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

came to mind (p. 42). Analytic memos served as a documentation tool for the process of determining codes and emerging categories, themes, and assertions (Saldaña, 2013). The memos about data become data, and guided the transition from reading over the data to coding to developing the themes presented in this dissertation. Memos were written on several topics, including but not limited to: (a) aspects related to the research design, such as the research questions and conceptual framework; (b) assumptions and related emerging themes; (c) future directions the study; and (d) personal connections to the research (Saldaña, 2013). On the importance of using memos, Miles et al. (2014) contended that “they are one of the most useful

and powerful sense-making tools at hand,” (p.96). Memoing throughout the study provided me a structured place to collect my thoughts related to all components of the study, especially the connections between theory and emerging study data. My memos were converted into a digital document and served as another component of the study’s dataset.

Another layer of data analysis was reading over the data corpus and writing analytic memos about the entire database (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Transcripts, memos, journal entries, surveys, field notes, and documents were read line-by-line with notes written in the margin, prior to coding and analytic memoing (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). At this point in data analysis, I explored the data in order to “develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105). I analyzed data by reading and taking notes throughout the study, however this approach was used more prior to first cycle coding. Additionally, the research design and review of literature guided my data analysis and methods.

Yin (2014) recommended to “play” with the data, in an attempt to discover patterns or concepts which emerged through data manipulation. It was during this data play that I began memoing about possible deductive codes as I “poured through” my data (Yin, 2014, p. 136). I used both deductive and inductive approaches during the initial coding cycle. Following initial coding of the study’s data and by relying on the recommendations of Saldaña (2013), the next steps of the data analysis phase emerged as the codes and analytic memos were analyzed, including making data visual, code reduction, and magnitude coding. The following three subsections discuss these three data analysis methods further.

**Making data visual.** Code landscaping was used to examine text from journals (see Appendix D). The frequency of the word in the journals correlates to the site and shade in the

code landscape (Saldaña, 2013). The larger and darker the word is, the more frequent it was used in journals. The coding process implemented led to the creation of another visual analytic strategy (Yin, 2014). As I used small color-coded sticky notes during coding, I realized that the more I used a code the thinner the sticky note pads became. I added a photo of the sticky note pads in my analytic memos as a way to make the data visual (see Appendix E). Finally, timelines of the study were created for each school counselor. Three timelines were created that indicated specific moments during the study for each school counselor. School counselors were then sent their individual timelines and asked to provide feedback and to check for accuracy. The final drafts of these timelines can be found in Appendix F. These different methods of making data visual provided multiple opportunities for data analysis as well as data analysis transitions (Saldaña, 2013).

**Code reduction.** Prior to coding I developed nine deductive codes and added four more inductive codes while coding (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, during initial coding there were 13 total codes (see Appendix G). After coding the study's data, analyzing the codes and memos, and rereading the data corpus, I was able to reduce the number codes from thirteen to the following eight codes:

- Support
- Passion Projects
- Trans Issues
- Affordances
- Limitations
- Motivation

- ACA Advocacy
- Trans Competency Levels

It was during this phase of data analysis that I continued to rely on the research questions, conceptual framework, and existing literature to help determine the reduction of codes, types of possible next steps in data analysis, and emerging themes.

The next stage of data analysis included coding the data corpus using the eight reduced codes. Analytic memoing revealed a need to pay closer attention to the limitations school counselors face as they develop as transgender advocates and so I first scanned the data corpus line-by-line a second time looking specifically for limitations faced by school counselors. After revisiting the data utilizing a lens of the limitations code, a second analysis was conducted to discover broad categories within the data. The final cycle of analysis identified the developing themes of the study, including three themes specifically aligned to the three research questions.

**Magnitude coding.** In an attempt to discover frequency and directionality specifically related to transgender competency levels, I applied the method of magnitude coding to a set of coded data (Saldaña, 2014). During the creation of my magnitude coding matrix (see Appendix H), a review of all participants' speech units related to the code "transgender competency levels" produced two levels: intermediate and advanced. There was not a need to add lower competency levels, such as a basic level, to the matrix for the three participants of this study. Speech units at the advanced level were transgender-related information which most of the public does not know and speech units at the intermediate level were transgender-related information which a majority of the public does not know. Analytic memos revealed a need to add magnitude coding to the data analysis, based on the number of codes related to transgender competency levels of the school

counselors experiences and knowledge related to transgender individuals. After the first cycle of coding, it appeared that the three school counselors had higher transgender advocacy levels, which aligned with my reflexive memoing about my assumptions being incorrect entering the study. The main purpose of adjusting the research design following the first inquiry group session was linked to my discovery that the three school counselors were more transgender competent than I had assumed. Therefore, the purpose of adding magnitude coding was to apply an analysis method towards the transgender competency levels of the school counselors. The magnitude coding analysis not only would reveal the school counselors transgender competency levels at the start of the inquiry group sessions, but also their levels following participation in the study (Saldaña, 2014). Magnitude coding provided a look at the three school counselors' transgender advocacy level upon entering the study and a comparison of their levels from first session to last session.

Making the study's data visual was a crucial component of data analysis, by providing insight into different layers of data, allowing for comparative analyses, and offering a perspective on the embedded unit of analysis Saldaña (2014). Implementing all of the procedures included in Creswell's (2013) data analysis spiral, themes of this study were identified and developed, from codes to categories and then to themes and sub-themes.

### **Validity**

In order to limit threats to the validity of the study, several strategies were incorporated into the research design of this study and implemented throughout data collection and analysis. As Maxwell (2013) posited, the methods and strategies listed in this section "do not guarantee validity," instead they help manage "validity threats" while "increasing the credibility" of the

study (p. 125). This study posed different threats to validity, such as assumptions about school counselor participants, research biases, and a lack of varied responses. The strategies discussed below were purposefully included into the research design to address this study's threats to validity.

The validity and credibility of the study were supported by the study's own data corpus. The study collected multiple sources of data for analysis and triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). The use of triangulation was employed to eliminate associations of chance and bias, and to converge evidence from different sources in order to determine themes (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). The data I collected were also "detailed and varied enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). Conclusions and findings were grounded in the rich and detailed data (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). Finally, a search for discrepant evidence was another strategy implemented to limit the threats to validity (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). A comparison of both discrepant and supporting evidence influenced the conclusions and findings of this study (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014).

The work of the inquiry group extended beyond the data collection phase of the study through the implementation of the validity test known as member checking (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). Participants of this study agreed to providing feedback on data once it had been analyzed, including conclusions and data analyses (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). Member checking, as described by Creswell (2013), is a strategy that "involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (p. 252). The



participants' examination and feedback of the analyzed data, including missing information, served as both a validation strategy and collection of additional evidence (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014).

In an attempt to reduce researcher bias and increase the validity of the study, the strategies of clarifying researcher bias and peer review were also utilized during my study (Creswell, 2013). Throughout the study, I wrote memos about my experiences in relation to the study's topics and participants, assumptions and interpretations, and research design decisions (Creswell, 2013). Whereas member checking provided feedback from the participants related to accuracy and missing information within the data analysis, the use of a peer reviewer provided somewhat of an external audit on my research methods and interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2013). I utilized the strategy of peer review from the designing of the research through the data analysis and interpretation, including the findings of this study. I also consulted with my dissertation committee members throughout the study in a similar manner. I recorded the accounts of my peer review sessions in memos. Clarifying researcher bias and peer review added another layer of strategies in an attempt to increase validity.

Another strategy implemented to increase validity was altering the research design in a manner which guided the school counselors towards advocacy development specific to transgender students. Termed intervention by Maxwell (2013), I implemented this strategy "to develop or test ideas about the group or topic studied," specifically school counselors' ability to develop as advocates for transgender students while participating in an inquiry group (p. 127). The specific intervention introduced was termed passion projects.

Lather (1986) challenged researchers to approach empirical research in a way that “both advances emancipatory theory-building and empowers the researched” (p. 64). This study pursued the academic rigor of producing empirical research data that will be used to make society more equitable and just for transgender students and purposely sought relevance for the school counselor participants and their transgender students (Lather, 1986). The study’s research design, specifically the conceptual framework, provided the participants an opportunity for empowerment and a transformation of their reality, a reality that is more supportive for transgender students (Blackburn, 2001; Lather, 1991). This concept of research which leads participants to empowerment and activism is termed catalytic validity (Lather, 1986, 1991). Lather (1986) argued that researchers should be more concerned for catalytic validity, that researchers should include catalytic validity for empirical accountability and validity. Lather’s (1991) argument for catalytic validity is two-fold: (1) “the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it,” and (2) “the desire to consciously channel this impact so that respondents gain self-understanding and, ultimately, self-determination through research participation” (p. 68). From the beginning of the study, the vision and goals of the inquiry group were aimed at impacting transgender students within each participant’s school and in the district. Additionally, the application of the concept of catalytic validity to this study aligned with the adjustments made to the research design, through the addition of passion projects. Therefore, catalytic validity serves as both a strategy to address the validity of the study and as a reason to conduct a study in a manner that empowers participants and positively shifts the reality of the experiences of transgender students.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the development of three school counselors collaborating in an inquiry group focused on developing as transgender advocates for the students within their schools. This chapter provided the details of my study's methodology, including the rationale for qualitative research and the research design. The research sample and site were discussed, including participant selection information. The methods for data collection and analysis were also discussed in detail. Lastly, the strategies implemented in an attempt to increase validity were addressed.

## Chapter 4 - Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the development of three school counselors collaborating in an inquiry group focused on developing as transgender advocates for the students within their schools. The study was guided by a paucity of support for school counselors, the conceptual framework discussed in earlier chapters, and the following research questions:

1. How do three school counselors participating in a professional inquiry group develop as advocates for transgender students?
2. What does this advocacy afford school counselors?
3. What are the limitations faced by school counselors developing as transgender advocates?

During the study, school counselors participated in inquiry group sessions, where the focus of our work became the development and implementation of individual advocacy projects called passion projects, based on the needs of transgender students in the school counselors' individual schools. The inquiry group addressed, through passion project work, the following self-identified participant needs: (a) transgender restroom school policy, (b) bullying, (c) educating staff on the rights of transgender individuals, and (d) name tag ally stickers. At the end of the study the inquiry group presented our work and individual passion projects at one of the district's school counselors' meeting. Finally, we met at a local restaurant to celebrate our individual transgender advocacy development and the work of the inquiry group.

This chapter details the case profile and the findings which emerged from an analysis of data collected for this study. The three themes that emerged from the data analysis are also

presented within this chapter. The following sources of data were analyzed and are the basis of this chapter's findings: inquiry group transcripts, field notes, surveys, journals, and documents. The first section of this chapter provides a profile of the case: a full representation which was bound by purpose, time, participants, and trajectory (Yin, 2014). The contexts of the three school counselors, including their experience in the study, provided another layer of data and another data analysis opportunity. Using evidence from the study's data corpus, my study has been holistically recreated in this chapter using thick descriptions in order to provide a meaningful understanding of the relationships between case, context, and participants (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Providing a descriptive case profile in this chapter not only offers a thorough understanding of a complex case, it also serves as a contextual basis for the themes presented in the second section of this chapter. The remainder of this chapter's introduction provides a more detailed description of the basic timeline of the study and the inquiry group design.

This study's data provided insight into the different contexts of each participant who represent the case. While there were commonalities between the participants who comprised the case, what seemed to be most significant were the contextual differences. Differing contexts resulted in varying levels of knowledge and experience, issues related to transgender individuals, and approaches to addressing issues. Throughout the study, these contexts played an important role in discovering the school counselors' knowledge and experiences related to transgender students and their development as transgender advocates.

Throughout the entire study, the purpose of the inquiry group was to support school counselors. However, as discussed in subsequent paragraphs, due to the participants' knowledge, experiences, and attitudes regarding transgender individuals, the purpose of the case shifted from

a basic level of support to a focus on developing school counselors as transgender advocates for their transgender students.

### **Case Profile**

The case profile includes evidence specific to findings related to the context of the overall case and then findings related to the contexts of each participant of the study. These contexts are related to the thematic findings shared in the next section of this chapter.

During the first session, participants journaled goals for the inquiry group. I then asked the group to collaboratively create a list of goals, based on the responses they wrote in their journals. Standing at the chart paper in the professional library, I wrote down the goals that the participants suggested and agreed upon. The goals collaboratively created by the participants at the first session were: (a) share with others and offer suggestions; (b) learn more legal issues, policy issues and gender identity laws; (c) create documents designed to support school counselors and other educators; (d) learn more about the transition to college for transgender students; (e) learn more about identification cards and driver's licenses for transgender students; and (f) recruit transgender speakers and resources for school counselors in the district (interview, October 26, 2015). A reproduction of the inquiry group's Issues and Goals Chart can be found in Appendix J.

During the first session, the case became bounded by the goals of the participants in the inquiry group, based on the needs of the participants and participant-researcher:

Dorothy: I think for me, I like the opportunity to share, all of us...and come up with good ideas for things and be able to offer suggestions to our colleagues about how to

better support students. Just strategies, like different strategies or different scenarios and what would you do, just like we were talking about.

Catherine: And at the different age levels too. Especially middle school and then even high school. It's different for a ninth grader than it is for a senior ready to move on.

Dorothy: Agreed.

Jack: You guys come together and share strategies and take strategies (personal communication, October 26, 2015).

The goals of the school counselors and their attitude toward the work of the inquiry group provided evidenced that the case was supportive and eager to work on supporting transgender students.

During the first inquiry group session I also noticed that the school counselors were more knowledgeable, had more experiences, and possessed more positive attitudes than I had originally assumed. After an informal review of the data and reflexive memos about the first session, I concluded that all participants had at least an intermediate level of competencies related to transgender students. Final data analysis, including the use of magnitude coding (see Appendix H), confirmed this early informal conclusion and produced results which supported my decision to adjust the research design based on the participants' levels of transgender competency.

An overall comprehensive study timeline, spanning from the participant recruitment period to the member-checking phase of my data analysis, can be found in Appendix K. This timeline is presented in chronological order with headings organized by month and year. This timeline served as a macro view of the case, which aided the data analysis of the individual

participants, their individual timelines, and the trajectories of the case which are subsequently addressed in this section.

**Participants.** Whereas my experiences in life have led me to the development of this study, similarly the individual experiences of the three school counselors who formed the case have led them to participation in the inquiry group. Their unique contexts and different experiences coupled with the goals of the inquiry group, help describe and explain the case profile. Accordingly, in this section of the case profile, findings related to the commonalities will be reported followed by the presentation of the contexts of each participant: Catherine, Dorothy, and Rose.

An analysis of data showed that the three participants who formed the case had some commonalities. Demographically, the participants were all white women who identified as cisgender and straight females, who were employed by the same large urban school district located in the Southeast United States. Professionally, all participants were school counselors, with whom I gained access through a gatekeeper in the school district. In terms of inquiry group participation, all participants volunteered to take part in the study, all missed one of the first four sessions, and all were eager participants during the sessions. During inquiry group discussions there were moments in which all participants seemed to take on the roles of expert, supporter, and learner. Lastly, when analyzing the three school counselors' transgender competency levels using a magnitude coding (see Appendix H) all were found to be intermediate at the beginning of the study and advanced at the end of the study.

**Catherine.** Catherine has worked in public education for 21 years, with twelve of those years in the role of school counselor. She has a Bachelor's degree in vocational education, a



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Master's degree in elementary education, and a Master's degree in counseling and personnel services. Catherine works at a magnet school with 695 students, 29.5% of whom are identified as free/reduced lunch students. Students are in grades kindergarten through twelve, however Catherine is assigned to support the students in grades seven through twelve.

I reviewed public documents for Catherine's school to access the most current data on her school's description. However, to protect anonymity the source has not been provided. The school is a districtwide public magnet school that is unique in the field of education, serving a diverse group of students in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade. Of the approximately 700 students at Catherine's school, 293 students are in the elementary grades, 172 students are in the middle school grades, and 236 students are in the high school grades. The school's membership includes students from every zip code in the city, assuring a diverse student population. The school itself is located in a repurposed group of buildings in the city's urban downtown. Additional unique characteristics of Catherine's school are the lack of green space and parking; transportation is not provided for students; selection into the school is highly coveted by the city's families; and students have a dress code, but there are not school uniforms. When asked how she would classify her school, Catherine responded, "K-12 magnet."

Throughout the study, Catherine discussed her school and professional experiences with students who identified as transgender and her students in general. Regarding her confidence level prior to participating in the inquiry group, Catherine reported, "I was confident in August, as I had a student that I worked with a few years ago who had experienced some of the trauma of being transgender in a straight world, especially concerning the bathroom issue," (interview, May 18, 2016). She frequently used one specific student as an example, walking the inquiry

group participants through her experience with the gender transition process of transgender students:

Catherine: I mean I went through this with one student for years. I had one, I probably nursed him through that for five years until they graduated and went on to [a prestigious university]...she had two little brothers, so she was the only girl, and mom didn't want to let go of the girl. I mean she had the girl. She wanted the girl. The kid was born a girl, but was not a girl. [The mother] finally just kind of turned the other cheek, sort of just stopped fighting it, but didn't want to support.

Dorothy: Didn't quite buy into it and decided it wasn't worth the battle.

Catherine: But this kiddo went on to [a prestigious university] and has done the operations and hormone therapy and the whole bit.

Dorothy: Well on her way to being a boy.

Catherine: Yes. Voice is deep now. I'm very, very proud of him.

Dorothy: And probably feeling a whole lot more comfortable.

Catherine: Absolutely.

A deeper analysis of the data specific to Catherine revealed that in all sessions she referred to this one transgender student that she supported for several years and how he taught her so much.

When Catherine discussed working with this specific student, she stated, "It taught me a lot. I dealt with him since he was in middle school and watched that whole transformation. And it was amazing," (interview, February 1, 2016). When asked whether her relationship with this transgender student prompted her to join this study's inquiry group, she replied, "Yes, that was the main reason. I'm still in touch with that kid and love him dearly," (interview, March 17,

2017). Catherine's experience working with this one specific student in a professional setting shaped her context.

At times Catherine took on the role of expert during the inquiry group sessions and those moments tended to revolve around her speech units specific to experiences with the specific transgender student aforementioned. At one session she offered to invite the student to speak with the inquiry group as a person with lived experiences and as a resource for the group, and Dorothy replied, "I think that would be awesome....I think it's a great idea," (Personal communication, October 26, 2015). While the inquiry group never had guest presenters, participants viewed Catherine as someone who could provide valuable resources for the entire group of participants in order to develop our transgender competency and advocacy levels.

Working in a school with kindergarten through twelfth grade produces a context that is very specific. Catherine discussed the experiences of students who attend a school with the same peers from the age of five through high school graduation:

A lot of our kids in our building start off as five-year-olds together. And by the time they go all the way through, they just evolve, and they just don't see the difference because they've grown up with them. (Personal communication, October 26, 2015).

The diversity of the student population coupled with remaining together with peers through thirteen years of school, shapes the context of Catherine's school in a way that suggests students may be more culturally competent and accepting of one another.

Catherine's context had also been shaped by her experiences with school administrative staff, such as principals, who do not treat transgender students in welcoming, supportive manners. During an inquiry group session, I eagerly informed the school counselors that the

superintendent had started to provide training on supporting transgender students to the district's principals, to which Catherine commented, "Good, because I know of some principals who look way down their noses at kids like that," (interview, October 26, 2015). While she seemed to be disappointed about the disrespectful principals, she remained hopeful that those principals would soon no longer be leaders in schools because "they are starting to retire and get out of the system" and the issue with negative school leaders would "naturally take care of itself," (interview, October 26, 2015).

The introduction of a "SBDM [school-based decision making council] policy that supported the needs of students who identify as transgender," was the passion project and advocacy work selected by Catherine (interview, March 31, 2016). When asked for the title of her passion project, she replied, "Gender Neutral Bathroom Project," (interview, December 8, 2016). Upon her decision to address the issues surrounding the school's restrooms and transgender students, Catherine first set up a meeting to discuss the topic with her principal and invited me as an expert. She and the principal then presented to her school's SBDM council the idea of adding language to a policy for the creation of a "Gender Neutral Bathroom," (interview, December 8, 2016). After approximately four months of consecutive SBDM council meetings in which the policy's language went through the SBDM policy revision process, the council adopted a policy that identified a restroom that would be gender neutral.

**Dorothy.** Dorothy has worked in public education for 25 years, with nine of those years in the role of school counselor. She has a Bachelor's degree in elementary education and a Master's degree in K-12 school counseling. Dorothy works at a magnet school with 1300

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students, 55% of whom are identified as free/reduced lunch students. Dorothy is assigned to support the students in the sixth grade.

I reviewed public documents for Dorothy's school to access the most current data on her school's description. However, to protect anonymity the source has not been provided. The school serves middle school students and is one of the most diverse schools in the state. Dorothy's school is located in an urban area of the city, adjacent to two other magnet schools, and a block away from a large university. Being that Dorothy's school is a magnet school, students from all regions of the district are represented at the school. A majority (51%) of the students who attend are enrolled in one of two magnet programs offered by the school: (a) visual and performing arts and (b) gifted and talented. The remaining students (49%) are either students who reside near the school (the school is their home school) or they receive special services offered by the school. Of the approximately 1300 students, 435 students are in sixth grade, 462 students are in seventh grade, and 406 students are in eighth grade. When asked how she would classify her school, Dorothy responded, "[it] has resides and magnet programs," (interview, October 5, 2016).

Dorothy's context, due to working exclusively with middle school students, was quite different from Catherine, Rose, and myself. Dorothy's perspective mirrored her summary of the middle school context: "Everything is bigger than life in middle school. It's magnified twenty-thousand times," (interview, October 26, 2015). Whereas Dorothy reported a melodramatic and overemotional description of the middle school student population, she depicted the typical middle school staff member as querulous and overcritical:

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Middle school kids, they say so many crazy things anyway, you know teachers or even administrators might be like, “Well this kid is not transgender, this is just attention seeking behavior.” So you’re not going to move mountains for somebody who is just playing games (Personal communication, November 30, 2015).

In addition, Dorothy’s assertions regarding the uniqueness of the middle school experience were often supported by the other school counselors in the inquiry group, such as the following discussion revolving around how middle school-aged students are often cruel to one another:

Dorothy: I won’t say that it’s still not an issue, because I do think kids still say cruel things.

Jack: To this [transgender student]?

Dorothy: To her and to others about whatever, because middle school kids just do that, that’s just kind of a common thing.

Catherine: That’s what they do.

Dorothy: That’s what they do. If I feel uncomfortable about me, let me point out what’s weird about you. Let me nitpick you right now, so no one will notice me.

Catherine: So I will look better. That’s what they do (Personal communication, October 26, 2015).

Dorothy’s descriptions of the difficulties and hyperbolic emotions experienced in middle school and the typical response to middle school-aged students are a large part of her context. However, Dorothy also expressed concern that she might miss opportunities to make a difference as a middle school counselor:

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If I can't figure out how to make a positive impact or do something that allows their experience to be [a little bit better], even if it's just little bit better than it could have been before, then they're in and out my door and I've done nothing to help that kid (Personal communication, November 30, 2015).

The middle school experience seems to offer a unique context not only for the students, but also the faculty, including school counselors such as Dorothy.

Throughout the study, Dorothy displayed a high interest and knowledge base related to the topic of transgender, however she was the only individual in the inquiry group without direct experience with transgender individuals. During an inquiry group session, Dorothy shared that while she did not "have any personal experience with anyone" who identified as transgender, she did have transgender awareness via the life and experiences of a transgender student featured on a television show:

The Jazz series I followed, because she's a kid and I was really interested in seeing...how [the transgender experience] was handled with her friendship group and in the community because she was transitioning from 8th to 9th grade. Well, that's speaking my language, so I watched it because to me it was just a fascinating story...but it wasn't a personal experience." (Personal communication, November 30, 2015)

Considering Dorothy's lack of experience working with transgender individuals, her dedication to transgender advocacy development, including trainings such as this study's inquiry group and learning about the lived experiences of transgender individuals through pop culture avenues, suggests a context which is different than all other participants.

Dorothy saw herself as more competent than most school counselors, stating that she knows “a couple of things about this topic,” whereas “a lot of school counselors...probably don’t have a clue,” (interview, November 30, 2015). Dorothy presented as a confident advocate for transgender students while simultaneously acknowledging her lack of personal experience working with transgender individuals. She is eager to advocate for transgender students as a knowledgeable and capable school counselor. Dorothy’s underutilized willing-and-ready-to-serve attitude towards transgender advocacy is another aspect of her context.

Considering the different aspects of Dorothy’s context, her decision to choose the routine topic of “bullying prevention” to “[develop] as an advocate” for transgender students now seems logical, (interview, March 9, 2016). However, during the data collection period, it appeared that Dorothy was less involved in the passion project process and transgender advocacy development than the rest of the inquiry group members. Dorothy called her own passion project “lame” because it did not resemble the other projects, stating that her aim was “to [just] be mindful and as supportive as I can, as these things kind of come up,” (interview, March 9, 2016). During data analysis, it became evident that for Dorothy, simply participating in the inquiry group and being willing to serve as an advocate for transgender students at her school allowed her to develop advocacy skills specific to transgender students, including being recognized as the authority on the topic:

I love that my principal recognizes that I'm doing this because...she will send people my way like I'm the resident expert now. I'm not an expert, but it's kind of funny, and what I don't know, we'll figure out. (Personal communication, March 9, 2016)



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This statement suggested that Dorothy felt confident advocating for transgender students even though she dismissed her principal's designation as the school's expert on supporting transgender students. Moreover, the statement revealed that because of her work in the inquiry group she was entrusted as a transgender expert at her school.

**Rose.** Rose has worked in public education for 12 years, with three of those years in the role of school counselor. She has a Bachelor's degree in elementary education and a Master's degree in K-12 school counseling. Rose works at a state agency school with 130 students, 78.8% of whom are identified as free/reduced lunch students. Students are in grades sixth through twelfth, and Rose is assigned to support all students within the school.

I reviewed public documents related to Rose's school in order to access the most current data on her school's description. In order to protect anonymity the source of these public documents have not been provided. The school serves middle school and high school students in need of intensive therapeutic support to overcome different types of crises and traumatic experiences. While students who attend Rose's school are unable to attend the district's regular schools, the ultimate goal is for her students to eventually transition back into regular classrooms. The average time of enrollment for students at Rose's school is nine months. When asked how she would classify her school, Rose responded, "State Agency School," (interview, October 3, 2016).

At the center of Rose's context and motivation are experiences related to her brother. During an inquiry group conversation, Rose revealed, "I think my passion comes from my brother," who is gay and who was bullied at a younger age, (interview, November 30, 2015). Rose felt "stuck...the bullying that happened to him...it tore [her] apart", however the fact that

her brother always had her support and that he is now happy, motivates her as a school counselor to provide her students the same affordances of support: “I want these kids to be them, no matter where they’re going, I want the to be them and feel like themselves and be accepted,” (interview, November 30, 2015). Following Rose’s narrative of her experiences and context, Dorothy commented, “That’s your personal story and where your passion comes from,” (interview, November 30, 2015).

The students at Rose’s school shaped her context beyond the personal level. Rose explained that although her school has “a smaller population” overall, “when you look at our numbers, we have a higher percentage of students who identify” as transgender (interview, November 30, 2015). In addition to adversities that her transgender students may have faced, they were also managing being cared for by the state while experiencing “higher trauma background,” (interview, November 30, 2015). Upon considering experiences with her brother, the higher numbers of transgender students entering her school, the lack of a parental support, and the limited amount of time students reside at her school, Rose’s personal and professional experiences are interwoven and motivated her to develop as a transgender advocate.

The student aspect of Rose’s professional experience was not the only school factor influencing her context. Rose’s staff also offered experiences and motivation which shaped her specific context: “...we have the school side and my teachers don’t tend to be very open,” (interview, November 30, 2015). Rose made it clear that she believed that her staff was capable of learning how to be more accepting and “really it might be that they just don’t know” how to show respect to transgender individuals, (interview, November 30, 2015). Rose’s “closed-

mindful” staff was so much of an influence on her context, the adults at her school were chosen as the issue she would address through her passion project.

When speaking about her own professional trainings, besides one of my short training she attend during the summer of 2015, Rose mentioned the inquiry group as the “first thing I’ve been involved in,” (interview, November 30, 2015). Rose felt comfortable with her ability to advocate for transgender students, even when she considered her lack of training on supporting transgender students, commenting, “Maybe that’s why it’s not overwhelming, because I really don’t know. Other than being an advocate in what I see as an issue for my school, what is expected of me?” (interview, November 30, 2015). Due to a specific need to address the issue of training staff to be more respectful to transgender individuals, specificity shaped Rose’s context.

Rose’s passion project was a training for her staff educating them “on trans terminology and harassment/discrimination laws” (interview, March 9, 2016). Collaborating with a district cultural competency specialist and myself, Rose designed a 30-minute presentation addressing the staff’s issues surrounding transgender students and individuals. The district’s cultural competency specialist and myself presented to Rose’s staff on March 1, 2016. During the fourth inquiry group session, Rose shared her perspective of how the presentation unfolded:

My teachers and staff were asking good questions and clarifying things, and at the end there was a brawl. Not a real brawl, but there was a heated discussion. It really confirmed for me that I have a good staff. (Personal communication, March 9, 2016)

Rose had a goal of a presentation that brought to light the transgender “conversation up front, because it’s just that everything is happening and nobody is talking about” (interview, November 30, 2015). While Rose felt that the presentation “stirred up controversy” she commented that she

“was glad because it needed to happen,” (interview, March 9, 2016). Rose revealed that after the presentation “interesting conversations” were occurring in her school, “almost half” of her staff indicated that they wanted more training related to transgender students, a student and a staff member “felt comfortable to” come out to her, and she believed that “now [her staff] really see me as an ally,” (interview, March 9, 2016). Rose also shared that there were rumors in her school that the training “was coming from the district,” and that she had to clarify to her staff, “this was me...I wanted this...I wanted you all to have this information,” (interview, March 9, 2016). Moreover, weeks after the presentation, Rose reported that the teacher most disrespectful to transgender individuals “began to show more respect for this population” (interview, May 18, 2016).

**Jack.** As participant-researcher and as the group’s expert on transgender culture and knowledge, supporting participants remained the overall purpose and my main goal for the case. During the first inquiry session, after each participant shared a few transgender issues at their schools and goals for the inquiry group, we created a chart of transgender issues and inquiry group goals (see Appendix J). After some conversation about the group’s goals, Dorothy inquired about my goals for the case: “What about you? What were your goals. I’m assuming you had some in mind when you put this together, right?” (interview, October 26, 2015). I explained that the goals listed by the inquiry group on the chart paper were my goals and that my main goal was to help them address the issues at their schools. Throughout the entire study, the participants seemed to remain in their school counselor roles by asking questions probing questions, intently listening, and remaining focused on the topics that were discussed. Even though the purpose, goals, and work revolved around the needs of the case and individual schools within the case, the

school counselors remained diligent in their efforts to make sure my researcher goals were met as well.

### **Thematic Findings**

The three thematic categories which were developed from the data are (1) transgender advocacy development, (2) affordances of transgender advocacy development, and (3) limitations school counselors face while developing as transgender advocates. Sub-themes for each of the three thematic categories are also presented. The thematic categories and sub-themes can be found in Appendix L.

The relationship between the three thematic findings are anchored to the experiences and contexts of the three school counselors of this study. While the school counselors benefited from their transgender advocacy development, they also faced limitations. Developing as an advocate for transgender students is a possibility for school counselors, and this development may include affordances as well as limitations. Support is another commonality between the three findings. Advocacy development depended on support, support was an affordance of advocacy development, and a lack of support in the field is a limitation faced by school counselors.

**Transgender advocacy development.** By the end of the study, 100% of the participants in the inquiry group, including myself, developed as transgender advocates, moving into either the “systems advocacy” or “social/political advocacy” domains of the ACA’s competencies (Lewis et al., 2003). School counselors develop as transgender advocates through inquiry group participation, passion project work, and small wins. The theme of transgender advocacy development is therefore divided into the following three sub-themes: (1) inquiry group participation, (2) passion project work, and (3) small wins.

*Inquiry group participation.* The three school counselors who participated in the study developed as transgender advocates because of their participation in the inquiry group. Each school counselor reported that inquiry group participation allowed for transgender advocacy development through the support they received from the inquiry group itself. The school counselors reported a feeling of being uplifted by the inquiry group (interview, April 28, 2016). And Catherine shared that the inquiry “group [was] a boost to” participating school counselors’ support systems (interview, April 28, 2016). During inquiry group sessions, the school counselors were able to discuss transgender topics and share stories related their transgender students. The conversations regarding transgender students provided the school counselors opportunities to acquire collegial support. Dorothy shared during an inquiry group session that she liked that the inquiry group provided opportunities for all of the school counselors to share “strategies or different scenarios” to better support and understand transgender students (interview, October 26, 2015). Transgender advocacy development through collegial support was possible through participation in the study’s inquiry group (interview, October 26, 2015; interview, November 30, 2015; interview, March 9, 2016).

Findings related to school counselors developing as transgender advocates through participation in an inquiry group were also derived from data specific to the inquiry group’s presentation at district meeting of school counselors. The school counselors shared with the audience that inquiry group participation allowed them to develop as advocates for their transgender students (interview, April 30, 2016). Catherine wrote in her journal, “This inquiry group was inspiring. It made me want to go out and do brave things” (interview, April 28, 2016). She felt that she would not have advocated for the transgender students at her school if she was

not a participant in the inquiry group; she was in awe of what she was able to accomplish with the support of the inquiry group in terms of developing as a transgender advocate (interview, April 30, 2016). Dorothy indicated in journal reflections and transcripts that the inquiry group cemented her status as a transgender advocate within her school by teachers and the principal, at one point saying, "...I love that my principal recognizes that I'm doing this...she will send people my way like I'm the resident expert now" (interview, March 9, 2016).

Lastly, participating in the inquiry group provided school counselors access to my expertise, support, and guidance. Trainings specific to supporting transgender students in education is limited, almost nonexistent. The only school counselor training in the state specific to advocating for transgender students was a 40-minute session presented by me last summer at a school counselor conference. While discussing the lack of trainings during an inquiry group session, Rose commented, "This is the first thing I've been involved in; I've been to your short training in the summer" (interview, November 30, 2015). The school counselors were able to develop as transgender advocates by taking advantage of this study's inquiry group, which was designed to offer collegial and expert support, focused on transgender advocacy development, and motivated by passion projects. Following the success of our inquiry group work on transgender advocacy, I plan to encourage the three school counselors to lead additional inquiry groups focused on transgender advocacy through passion projects, extending the work of this study.

***Passion project work.*** Prior to joining the study and being asked to focus on a passion project, the school counselors were situated at the microlevel of the ACA advocacy competencies, working one-on-one with the individual transgender students at their schools. As

part of their roles in schools, school counselors frequently advocate for their students within the client/student domain of the ACA's advocacy competencies. The purpose for introducing passion projects into the research design was to move school counselors toward the macrolevels of advocacy, as indicated in the ACA's advocacy competencies. After the first inquiry group session, I decided to adjust the research design by introducing projects that addressed issues we identified at our schools. These projects were called passion projects. Following the initial decision to include passion projects as part of the work of the inquiry group, I ensured the school counselors that I would be supportive of their endeavors, including one-on-one support specific to their school's specific needs. During inquiry group sessions and through email communications, I solicited my support: "Again, I am available via email or I can swing by your school to help plan" (interview, December 1, 2015). I was able to meet with both Catherine and Rose at their respective schools outside of the inquiry group sessions in order to support them with their individual passion projects.

Data analysis revealed that the school counselors addressed issues in their passion project work in which they also listed as issues during the first session (interview, October 26, 2015; interview, April 28, 2016). During the first session, the inquiry group was asked to create a collaborative list of issues transgender students face. The school counselors each addressed issues they listed on the chart for their passion project work: Catherine addressed the issue of restrooms, Dorothy addressed bullying, and Rose addressed culture and teachers (interview, October 26, 2015). This is relevant since the passion project task was not introduced until a later time, selection of transgender issues was up to the individual school counselors, and selection of passion project work was not limited to issues listed on the chart. This indicates that perhaps the



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school counselors were aware of transgender issues which existed at their schools and supports the idea that the transgender competency levels of these school counselors were beyond the basic level upon entering the study. However, the school counselors were not advocating for transgender students at the macrolevel level. School counselors were aware of issues that existed within their own schools, but it was not until they were asked to work on a passion project while being a part of inquiry group that they served as advocates.

All three school counselors developed as transgender advocates due to their passion project work and membership in the inquiry group. During the fourth inquiry group session, the school counselors each wrote in their journals about how working on their passion project allowed them to develop as transgender advocates. Catherine reflected that the passion project helped her feel more empowered and that she felt “joyful” due to her colleagues supporting her efforts on a restroom use policy (interview, March 9, 2016). Dorothy wrote that she felt “confident in [her] ability to advocate for transgender students” due to her passion project work focused on bullying and school culture (interview, March 9, 2016). Rose reflected that the passion project made her feel more comfortable talking with her staff about transgender issues. She also felt that the passion project has helped her be viewed as an advocate by others, writing, “Staff and students are seeing me as an advocate because of the nature of our conversations” (interview, March 9, 2016). Even as the inquiry group’s transgender advocacy development expert, my understanding of transgender advocacy, and advocacy in general, developed due to my work on a passion project and related reflection. Through most of the study I felt that my tiny rainbow ally stickers were more at the microlevel, which caused me to feel less of an advocate compared to other passion projects, especially Catherine’s and Rose’s projects. It

was not until I finally had them made and handed them out at the first school that I realized that the stickers were actually coupled with training, a message, and controversy. A seemingly simple passion project in fact catapulted me into advocacy at a macrolevel.

*Small wins.* Another finding that emerged from the study was that regardless of the perceived magnitude of each participants' advocacy work, we were advocates. A school counselor develops as a transgender advocate as soon as they decide to address an issue in which a transgender student may face at their school and securing any size win. Throughout the study I gently encouraged the school counselors with their advocacy development, often reminding that advocacy development does not require us to necessarily take on massive endeavors; there are many "little things," "small wins," and "small payments" in our schools as well as society we can address (interview, October 26, 2015; interview, November 30, 2015). However, I personally struggled with my own feelings of dissatisfaction of the magnitude of both Dorothy's and my own passion project through most of the study. While I privately felt dissatisfied, I publicly motivated in a positive manner, including when I shared with the inquiry group during the first session that I preferred working on "small wins" and that I am "not a policy person" (interview, October 26, 2015). It was not until the data analysis phase of the study that I would assert that all four of us developed as transgender advocates. Furthermore, not only did each of us develop as transgender advocates, all four of us moved from the microlevel of advocacy to the macrolevel during the course of the study.

Throughout the study, Dorothy seemed more interested in increasing her transgender knowledge and comfort level by attending inquiry group sessions than working on the passion project. When asked to select a passion project, Dorothy chose to focus on bullying, generally, at

her school. When asked to journal about what she would like to work on and try at her school, she wrote, "I'm not sure what resources I need, yet" (interview, November 30, 2015). At a later session she was asked to journal about what she needed in order to become an advocate, she replied, "Nothing needed, at this point" (interview, March 9, 2016). She did not accept my offers of support outside of the sessions as well. However, Dorothy consistently indicated that she was eager to meet with the inquiry group for our sessions, describing the experience as "enlightening, informative, and transformative" (interview, April 28, 2016). She wrote that the by participating in the inquiry group she was "better informed about transgender issues" (interview, April 28, 2016). Dorothy also eagerly shared that her principal publicly acknowledged her and promoted her as a transgender advocate (interview, March 9, 2016). Prior to analyzing the data, I assumed that Dorothy had not developed as a transgender advocate because it seemed that she had not embraced the passion project concept. However, during the data analysis phase, the early findings contradicted my assumption and indicated that Dorothy had developed as a transgender advocate. Subsequent data analyses revealed that Dorothy's participation in the inquiry group influenced her transgender advocacy development more than her passion project work. Dorothy's transgender advocacy work moved from the individual level to a systems or school level when her principal recognized her work with the inquiry group and began directing other staff members to seek Dorothy's expertise (interview, April 28, 2016). Even though Dorothy stated that she felt her passion project was "lame" when compared to the other school counselors' passion projects, she seemed satisfied with her overall transgender advocacy development, saying, "So it was kind of cool. I guess at some point, the more little things that happen, you sort of develop a reputation" (interview, April 28, 2016). Therefore, transgender advocacy

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development for school counselors does not necessarily depend on the implementation of passion projects or the creation of products.

As a participant in the inquiry group, my own transgender advocacy development was directly related to the passion project I chose to pursue. Before the study began, I attempted to locate and purchase tiny rainbow stickers, which would be placed on the name tags of LGBTQ ally employees in the district, indicating their support for transgender individuals. After several unsuccessful attempts to discover the type of stickers I wanted, I abandoned this work. After subsequent meetings with the school counselors and introducing the passion projects, I resumed my efforts to locate and purchase the tiny rainbow stickers as my own passion project. I chose the stickers as my passion project because they were truly a passion of mine, however throughout the inquiry group sessions I often felt that they were a lesser passion project when compared to Catherine's work on policy and Rose's work on training her staff. Even after much difficulties acquiring the type and size of stickers I wanted, the tiny rainbow stickers always felt like a "small win" and not macrolevel advocacy work. I began handing the stickers out to the district's school psychologists, individual acquaintances, and peers. It was not until the day after I visited a high school's Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) that I realized that even small stickers are capable of being macrolevel advocacy work as well as controversial. As I was leaving the GSA meeting, I provided several of my tiny rainbow stickers to the staff sponsor to hand out to other interested staff allies at the school. The next day, the principal of the school called me and discussed his disapproval of the stickers and explained to me that he told the staff members not to place the stickers on their badges. He explained that this would cause some division between his staff members and in fact all of his staff members were supportive of transgender students (interview,

December 2015). His statements conflicted with the comments made about many of the staff members at the school by transgender students the night before during the GSA meeting. It was this controversy which allowed me to understand that even a simple sticker is capable of moving one's transgender advocacy work to most macrolevel of the ACA's advocacy competencies. A rainbow sticker placed on one's name badge is more than just a sticker, it is a statement, it is an attempt to shift the culture of the organization, and it is capable of causing a controversy. As it turned out, a sticker coupled with training, a message, and a controversy moved my passion project work to the macrolevel. In fact, an attempt to provide tiny rainbow stickers to transgender-supportive staff members in every school within the district would take a great amount of work, time, and politics, but my passion project is that first "small win" that motivated me to work for even more wins and to advocate further.

During the second inquiry group session Dorothy discussed the small wins of advocacy work, foreshadowing her own journey during the study:

Just removing one little road block at a time. You know, Rome wasn't built in a day. So we just have to have goals that we think we can accomplish that will make some impact even if its just those little small things in the beginning and then work toward, and that's where the bully prevention comes from; you're working toward a culture and a climate change, just by recognizing this as being an issue. (interview, November 30, 2015)

While the inquiry group might not have shifted the national political climate, we changed the realities within our own school, directly improving the experiences of transgender students. Our small wins may actually have been infinitely massive to the individual transgender students we

serve, which supports the call for school counselors to serve as advocates for transgender students.

The three school counselors and I developed as advocates for transgender students during this study. The inquiry group format supported transgender advocacy development through expert and collegial support, inspiration, and motivation. The supportive nature of the inquiry group and the school counselors' readiness allowed the addition of passion projects to successfully help develop their advocacy on behalf of transgender students. Finally, the small wins and successes we garnered allowed us to develop our transgender advocacy and to experience the act changing the realities in their schools in order to improve the lives of others.

**Affordances of transgender advocacy development.** Several affordances for school counselors developing their transgender advocacy emerged during data analysis. The different affordances of developing as a transgender advocate were grouped into two sub-themes of affordances: (1) internal affordances and (2) external affordances.

*Internal affordances.* Affordances which were found to pertain to the individual participants, such as knowledge, empowerment, and confidence, were classified as internal affordances. Accordingly, the three sections of the sub-theme of internal affordances are titled (1) increased transgender knowledge, (2) empowerment, and (3) confidence.

*Increased transgender knowledge.* The first internal affordance was an increase in transgender knowledge for school counselors participating in an inquiry group and who developed as transgender advocates.

While I had determined during first cycle coding that the transgender competency level of the inquiry group was greater than I had initially assumed, further data analysis also revealed

that the school counselors were not at the advanced level of transgender competency, including transgender knowledge. It was during first cycle coding that I utilized magnitude coding as suggested by Miles et al. (2014) and Saldaña (2013) to determine the transgender competency levels of the individual school counselors and the inquiry group as a whole, in order to determine if their transgender knowledge had increased during the study. What emerged from the magnitude coding was an increase in transgender competencies scores for each school counselor and the inquiry group as a whole (see Appendix H). During subsequent coding cycles, I analyzed the speech units contained in the Trans Competencies Matrix specific to transgender knowledge to determine if the school counselors had increased their transgender knowledge. During the first inquiry group session, the school counselors' speech units specific to transgender knowledge were determined to be 78.8% intermediate and 21.2% advanced. In comparison, the school counselors' speech units specific to transgender knowledge in the fourth inquiry group session were found to be 33.3% intermediate and 66.6% advanced. This finding is consistent with the school counselors' self-reporting in journals, conversations during inquiry group sessions, and other data.

In their final journal entries all three school counselors indicated that their transgender knowledge had increased (interview, May 18, 2016). Specific to an increase in transgender knowledge, Rose wrote, "my knowledge of terminology and how to handle various situation increased" (interview, May 18, 2016). Additionally, the school counselors associated their ability to serve as transgender advocates with their increased transgender knowledge: "My knowledge has increased, which will allow me to advocate of transgender students," (Dorothy); "My knowledge...increased, these increasing my ability to help transgender students," (Rose); "I feel

even more able to stand up for these kids than I did before,” (Catherine) (interview, May 18, 2016). All three school counselors also attributed their increased transgender knowledge with an increase in “comfort level” as it pertained to advocating for transgender students and transgender advocacy development (interview, May 18, 2016).

*Empowerment.* The second internal affordance was empowerment for school counselors participating in an inquiry group and who developed as transgender advocates.

Consider Lather’s (1991) approach to empowerment, who drew from Fox’s (1988) interpretation of the term. According to Lather (1991), empowerment, “a process one undertakes for oneself,” means “analyzing ideas about the causes of powerlessness, recognizing systemic oppressive forces, and acting both individually and collectively to change the conditions of our lives” (p. 4). While analyzing the data specific to Rose’s context and transgender advocacy development, it was Lather’s (1991) notion of empowerment that immediately emerged. Rose was empowered after successfully addressing her staff regarding their unprofessionalism towards transgender individuals. On empowerment, she reflected, “I was able to show my building through my actions, training, and words that I support all students” (interview, May 18, 2016). Catherine reflected in her final journal entry that she felt “even more able to stand up for [transgender] kids” than she did before (interview, May 18, 2016). She also claimed that her transgender advocacy development “inspired the beginnings of [a] movement” which changed the conditions at her school (interview, May 18, 2016).

Dorothy discussed aspects of her empowerment during an inquiry group session by commenting “we just have to have goals that we think we can accomplish that will make some



impact...working toward a culture and a climate change” just by recognizing issues that exist within schools, (interview, November 30, 2015).

In field notes I identified the inquiry group’s presentation at the districtwide school counselors meeting as a moment of empowerment. I wrote:

Each participant publicly acknowledged the inquiry group and the power it had given each of us - the power to develop as a transgender advocate. Standing in front of the audience, each of us felt empowered that day - and it was somewhat overwhelming. As a participant, I was deeply moved, touched, and honored to be there with those school counselors who were truly making a difference in the world. (Personal communication, April 30, 2016)

As a research participant, the empowerment I felt was related to both my work as a participant and as a researcher. Witnessing the school counselors during that moment, for me, was commensurate to seeing a visual representation of empowerment. The entire process in which each school counselor engaged, so that they were able to develop as transgender advocates, was a process of empowerment.

Furthermore, when asked to journal about their transgender advocacy development, all three school counselors used the term “empowering” or “transformative” to describe their experience (interview, May 18, 2016). The process of developing as a transgender advocate naturally produced the affordance of empowerment, due to the comparability of both processes. Every participant in the inquiry group, including myself, had a feeling of empowerment due to our transgender advocacy development and involvement in the inquiry group (interview, April 30, 2016).

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*Confidence.* The third internal affordance was confidence for school counselors participating in an inquiry group and who developed as transgender advocates. Findings of an increase in confidence is in regards to confidence specific to transgender advocacy.

The school counselors reported being more confident at the end of the study when compared to the start of the study in August 2015. These finding correlate with the transgender competency levels of the school counselors indicated in this study's previously reported data analysis (interview, May 18, 2016). As reported in their final journal entries, all school counselors developed their confidence levels (interview, May 18, 2016). When asked to compare their level of confidence at the end of the of the study to their level at the start of the study, Dorothy wrote, "I'm much more confident, due to my participation in the group" (interview, May 18, 2016). Catherine echoed Dorothy's reflection, writing "I feel even more confident that I can advocate for this group [of students]" (interview, April 28, 2016). Rose reported that she felt more comfortable in her role as the school counselor supporting both the students and adults in her school. Her increased confidence level even led her to feel capable of working with transgender students at the district level (interview, May 18, 2016). Moreover, at the end of the first inquiry group session while discussing meeting locations, Dorothy already seemed confident as part of the inquiry group, suggesting that we meet some where different for the last session to "celebrate our victory" (interview, October 26, 2015).

School counselors who took advantage of an inquiry group focused on transgender advocacy development increased their confidence specific to transgender advocacy.

*External affordances.* Affordances which were found to pertain to external factors, such as support, being seen as an expert, and impacting transgender students, were classified as

external affordances. Accordingly, the three sections of the sub-theme of external affordances are titled (1) impacting transgender students, (2) identified as an expert, and (3) support.

*Impacting transgender students.* The first external affordance was positively impacting transgender students for school counselors participating in an inquiry group and who developed as transgender advocates. Impacting the actual transgender students within each participant's building was a reason for the inclusion of the passion projects. Passion projects were added to the study to encourage the transgender advocacy development of participating school counselors and to trigger change within their schools. Transgender advocacy development of the three school counselors and the implication of the concepts of catalytic validity afforded transgender students support and advocacy within their own schools. Consequently, an external affordance of school counselors developing as transgender advocates is a positive impact on transgender students' realities.

In the first session, Dorothy was the first to suggest the following goal for the inquiry group: "Come up with strategies to better support our transgender students" (interview, October 26, 2017). She provided support to her transgender students by being a visible ally and advocate to her transgender students. Dorothy's transgender advocacy development and inquiry group work led her staff to identify her as the school-based transgender expert, and allowed her to work with transgender students, cis students, and staff members in regards to transgender issues, which impacted the transgender students at her school. Transgender students at Catherine's school were provided support in the form of a school policy related to restroom use, becoming the first school in the district "with a totally unisex restroom" (interview, April 28, 2017). Rose supported her

transgender students by providing her staff training “to help build a culture of acceptance” and respect of transgender individuals (interview, November 30, 2015).

*Identified as an expert.* Another external affordance of transgender advocacy development is being recognized by others as an expert. The school counselors were identified as experts by students and staff within their own schools. Additionally, the school counselors identified their own standing as a transgender expert within their respective schools during the study.

The school counselors began reporting being recognized as experts within their schools after months of being a part of the study. In fact, all three school counselors reported an increase of staff and students seeking their transgender expertise over the course of the study (interview, March 9, 2016). Dorothy’s principal began recognizing her as an expert and started sending other staff members to her for transgender-related matters (interview, March 9, 2016). During the final inquiry group session when Dorothy said, “I’ll say I’ve got a meeting coming up and I’m going to leave a little early, and [the principal] will send people my way like I’m the resident expert now,” she was connecting her inquiry group work and transgender advocacy development with being identified as an expert (interview, March 9, 2016). Rose reported being seen as an expert and ally by both her students and her staff as a result of her transgender advocacy development (interview, March 9, 2016; interview, May 18, 2016). I observed the principal at Catherine’s school depend on Catherine’s transgender expertise while we discussed a plan to bring a transgender-friendly restroom use policy to her school’s decision making council for adoption (interview, February 4, 2016). Consequently, during that meeting I decided that I would not

attend the council meeting as an expert, as we had previously planned, because of Catherine's display of expertise (interview, February 4, 2016).

The lead school counselor for the district was eager to have the inquiry group present our passion project work and transgender advocacy development during a districtwide school counselor meeting, welcoming our expertise (interview, November 30, 2015). During an inquiry group session, I discussed how each school counselor was developing as a transgender advocate and how quickly I have noticed their expertise being recognized by others. I explained to the school counselors that the changes in their schools were connected to each of them as a "catalyst," and "over time, your culture and your climate switch, and then you become an expert because people keep throwing stuff at you. It helps you develop" (interview, March 9, 2016). By developing their transgender advocacy while participating in an inquiry group, school counselors are afforded the designation of transgender expert.

*Support.* Support was the final external affordance finding that emerged during data analysis. The external affordance of support was centered around the inquiry group: the support school counselors received from one another and the support provided by myself.

Catherine wrote, "It was uplifting to know that there are other supporters of this group, and that I can call on these people for support if/when I need to" (interview, April 28, 2016). When asked to list three words that described her experience in the inquiry group, one of the words Catherine wrote was "supportive" (interview, April 28, 2016). Dorothy wrote, "Hearing experiences from other counselors helped to enhance my exposure to the variety of issues transgender students may face" (interview, April 28, 2016). She also wrote that the inquiry group provided "much needed information and support" (interview, April 28, 2016). And Rose

journalized about being able to connect with other school counselors and transgender advocates within the district as one of her affordances (interview, April 28, 2016). On her inquiry group experience, Rose concisely wrote “I felt supported,” which aligns with the finding of support as an external affordance (interview, April 28, 2016).

Data analysis of the inquiry group transcriptions support the findings that the school counselors supported each other throughout the study through conversations, suggestions, and sharing of experiences related to transgender students, transgender issues, and solutions (interview, October 26, 2015; interview, November 30, 2015; interview, March 9, 2016). Pages of conversations between the school counselors in the inquiry group can be found throughout the study’s transcriptions and include the voices of all of the school counselors. The following conversation, about a time Catherine provided simple support to one of her students who had an issue at her school, is one example of when the school counselors provided collegial support during an inquiry group session:

Dorothy: Sometimes I’ll just say, “What can I do? How can I make it better? I want to help.” And if they can’t answer me, then I may give them several options and say, “Do you feel like this would be helpful? and sometimes it’s the simplest thing. “If you just email my teacher and tell her that this is going on. You know, I’ll do that right now.”

Catherine: That’s what this one did. This little guy...emailed all of his teachers and said, “I would rather you call me by this name and if you need to talk to me about this, I’ll be glad to talk to you about it.”

Dorothy: That’s smart.

Catherine: And there wasn’t one teacher that had a problem with that.

Dorothy: That's actually really good advice. (interview, October 26, 2015)

While the school counselors may not have had my level of theoretical background or research knowledge, they were practitioners with many experiences working with students, which I was not. The school counselors in the inquiry group were afforded support from other inquiry group school counselors at a level that exceeded my prior assumptions. While this finding was surprising, the finding that school counselors were afforded support from myself was expected.

What initially emerged from data analysis was that though the school counselors considered me the transgender expert of the inquiry group they did not use speech units to label me as such, nor did they write about my expertise specifically in their journals. If such data collection methods did not provide tangible data for this finding, they added conceptually. For example, throughout the study's inquiry group sessions the school counselors would seek my expertise on transgender situations; ask questions that they had about terminology, district protocols specific to transgender students, and gender identity in general; and solutions and resources related to transgender issues (interview, October 26, 2015; interview, November 30, 2015; interview, February 1, 2016; interview, March 9, 2016). When asked to journal about the goals of the inquiry group, Dorothy wrote that she wanted to become "aware of legal issues and policies" and Catherine wrote that "support" was one of her main goals for the inquiry group (interview, October 26, 2015). Additionally, as I concluded the first inquiry group session Dorothy commented, "I'll be back, don't worry about that" (interview, October 26, 2015). The school counselors joined the study because they wanted to be supported by an expert in their transgender advocacy development.

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During inquiry group sessions and in emails I communicated with the inquiry group's school counselors that I would support their passion project work as an expert and that I was available to visit them at their schools "to support" their transgender advocacy work (interview, December 1, 2015). Catherine and Rose both contacted me via email and invited me to their schools in order to utilize my transgender expertise. Catherine wrote in an email, "I talked to [my principal], and she would love to meet with you Thursday," to setup a meeting with her principal and myself to discuss her plan to introduce a transgender-related policy to her school's decision making body (interview, February 1, 2016). Rose wrote in an email that she and her associate principal agreed that her staff needed a transgender-specific training and invited me to her school to discuss the training (interview, December 7, 2015). Between January 2016 and March 2016, Rose requested my expertise several times in order to complete her passion project. Both Catherine and Rose successfully completed their passion projects, supported by my expertise: Catherine's decision making body adopted a transgender-friendly restroom policy and Rose's staff was trained on being culturally sensitive to transgender people (interview, March 9, 2016; interview, May 18, 2016).

There are both internal and external affordances for school counselors developing as advocates for their transgender students. Internal affordances included an increase in transgender knowledge, empowerment, and confidence. External affordances included positively impacting transgender students, being identified as an expert, and receiving support. By developing as an advocate for transgender students, not only do transgender students receive an advocate, school counselors also receive multiple affordances themselves.



**Limitations of transgender advocacy development.** Data analysis revealed that school counselors face many limitations when developing as transgender advocates. The sub-themes of (1) school counselor workloads, (2) paucity of trainings, and (3) deterrents emerged as three significant limitations.

***School counselor workloads.*** When asked about the workloads of school counselors during an inquiry group session, Catherine discussed caseloads, which included the number of and grade levels of students served. She explained that her caseload was approximately 300 students in multiple grades, whereas most school counselors “usually have one grade level...500 kids or whatever in that grade level” (interview, February 1, 2106). Rose serves approximately 130 residential students in multiple grade levels who are moderately to severely emotionally disturbed. And Dorothy serves approximately 1000 students in middle school. During an inquiry group session Dorothy discussed the difficulties of trying to counsel a large number of students, especially if a student’s issue requires several days of the school counselor’s schedule: “I cannot individually counsel every kid that needs it with a thousand kiddos and ECE and all the other responsibilities” (interview, October 26, 2017). The caseloads of school counselors is another workload issue, limiting school counselors’ transgender advocacy development.

The three school counselors shared that their workloads included the unique task of working with both transgender students whom are victims and the bullies or people whom are doing harm. Additionally, school counselors work with individuals who are not knowledgeable of transgender issues, laws, and/or policies within their schools who may also be causing issues for transgender individuals. School counselors advocate for and support students who are in need, but they must also work with individuals who may be causing issues. On supporting those

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individuals whom cause issues for others, Rose asserted, “They still need to feel comfortable coming to us too. We are for everyone” (interview, October 26, 2015). Additionally, the inquiry group indicated that their work included not only the students, but also adults within the learning community (interview, October 26, 2015). All of the school counselors reported that in addition to working with a large caseload of students, they also counseled other staff members and parents, which also includes bullies, oppressors, and unaccepting adults (interview, October 26, 2015). Intolerant or prejudiced people and those who do harm to others are equally a part of school counselors’ workloads. Transgender advocacy development is limited due to school counselors working to resolve issues that involve victims, bullies, and bystanders.

At our second inquiry group session Dorothy commented:

Here’s what I see being the stumbling block for getting people more involved in training: Is it something that I’m really going to have to deal with in the next year?

Then [school counselors] are probably not going to come, because already your time is so short. (interview, November 30, 2015)

Dorothy stated that school counselors “already have so many things that [they] are required to do” and unless they see the relevance of a topic, it is just “one more thing” added to their workload, (interview, November 30, 2015).

During the data analysis phase, as the finding of workload as a limitation to school counselor transgender advocacy development began emerging, I emailed the district’s lead school counselor for an overall list of the school counselor duties in the district. She sent a document which contained several pages of compiled school counselor job demands, duties, and expectations, and ended the email, “We use our counselors very differently than most...which I

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hate” (interview, January 3, 2017). Some examples of the job demands listed were school and districtwide crisis first responders; chair all exceptional child education meetings and “monitor all Americans with Disability Act mandates with teachers and students, including Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 legislation;” prepare students for college and/or careers; scheduling; academic planning for all students; monitor student academic progress and offer interventions for students; suicide prevention and education; and serve as the school’s assessment coordinator (interview, January 3, 2017). Each of these job demands are comprised of several components. For example, when serving as the assessment coordinator, school counselors are responsible for developing the school’s plan for testing administration, distributing and collecting testing material, completing bubble sheets, and performing required testing training for staff, for ten or more school-wide assessments throughout the year (interview, January 3, 2017). The workload detailed in the lead school counselor’s document was created in addition to the district’s official school counselor job description document.

The district’s official school counselor job description identifies the following three main responsibilities for school counselors: (1) “orientation, academic planning, and class scheduling for individual students;” (2) “maintenance of all student records;” (3) “and the implementation of federal, state, and local educational mandates” (interview, January 3, 2017). Additionally, the document lists thirteen performance responsibilities, with the thirteenth being an open-ended responsibility to perform additional tasks assigned by the school’s principal. The district in which the school counselors of this study work, has placed numerous demands on its school counselors which limits their ability to develop as transgender advocates.

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The amount of work school counselors assume and/or are expected to assume limits their transgender advocacy development. The job demands of school counselors are influenced by several different entities, including their district, ACA, ASCA, and the school community in which they work. The more I researched school counselor expectations, the greater the workload became. While I never developed a research question specific to the workload of school counselors, at every point of the study I wondered if their expected workload was realistically manageable in general and specifically in regard to their ability to develop as transgender advocates. A dilemma surrounding this finding is that the finding in the next subsection indicates that training specific to transgender advocacy work needs to be added to the workload of school counselors.

***Paucity of trainings.*** The lack of transgender-specific training is a limitation to transgender advocacy development for school counselors. Throughout the study the school counselors in the inquiry group discussed the lack of trainings for school counselors specific to the topic of transgender students and transgender advocacy development. Rose discussed not knowing much about transgender students or developing as a transgender advocate. While discussing the lack of trainings, Dorothy shared that the only other training she received was another transgender-specific I presented and Rose added, “This is the first thing I’ve been involved in. I’ve been to your short training in the summer”(interview, November 30, 2015). I have facilitated the limited number of school counselor transgender-specific trainings for the school counselors in this school district’s region, however only one of the trainings was specific to school counselors transgender advocacy development. And as Rose mentioned, the training was a short 30-minute workshop session for the district’s school counselors during a summer

conference (interview, July 21, 2016). Therefore, for the school counselors within the district there has been only one 30-minute opportunity at a conference with self-selected workshops to learn about developing as transgender advocates for their students. To my knowledge, there have been no other transgender advocacy development opportunities within the region for this district's school counselors.

When asked to journal about their top priorities related to transgender students, Catherine indicated that training was a key priority (interview, October 26, 2015). In fact, all three school counselors identified training or receiving information as being a priority for the group's work (interview, October 26, 2015; interview, November 30, 2015). Even as the study was being concluded, Rose indicated in her journal that she "would like to attend more trainings," which supports the assertion that there is a paucity of transgender advocacy development trainings for school counselors.

***Deterrents.*** Deterrents is the final sub-theme of limitations school counselors face. These limitations were grouped as deterrents due to negativity and fear associated with them. The following impediments emerged as deterrents during data analysis: harmful, intolerant, or ignorant adults; ineffective relationships between school counselors and their transgender students; and the complexity and nuances of transgender terminology and language. Accordingly, the three sections of the sub-theme of deterrents are titled (1) adults, (2) school counselor relationships with transgender students, and (3) transgender terminology and language.

***Adults.*** Some staff members and parents of students serve as deterrents to transgender advocacy development for school counselors. All three school counselors shared that other staff members and/or parents with which they worked were impediments at times. For example,

during an inquiry group session Rose asked, “But how do I address that teacher who says, ‘Legally you can't make me call Sarah [the name] Steven?’” (interview, March 9, 2016). She added that another staff member refused to call transgender individuals by their preferred pronouns (interview, March 9, 2016). Adults who hinder school counselors ultimately limit school counselors’ transgender advocacy development and their ability to support the transgender student. During a discussion about the training I presented to her staff, Rose also commented, “I can't imagine...this topic with my staff,” supporting the finding of adults as deterrents to transgender advocacy development, (interview, March 9, 2016). Apropos the difficulties of working with adults related to transgender students, Dorothy commented, “They don't know what to do with that. So, that which we do not understand is scary and it's just really easy to judge without realizing you're even being judgmental” (interview, November 30, 2015). Dorothy also shared that she had experienced working with a parent who was not supportive and that she was forced to carefully walk a line of supporting the depressed student as well as the anti-LGBTQ parent. And during the first inquiry group session, after I asked about issues at their schools, Catherine asserted, “Well, parents obviously” (interview, October 26, 2015). All three school counselors wrote in their journals about difficulties working with adults in their schools (interview, October 26, 2015; interview, November 30, 2015). Furthermore, the inquiry group listed issues facing transgender students on a chart in the first session and both “teachers” and “parents” were included by the school counselors (interview, October 26, 2015).

*School counselor relationships with transgender students.* Another finding that emerged from the data analysis was that school counselors at times face difficulties building effective relationships with transgender students. Torn between helping a child and being transgender

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competent has been reported as a limitation to transgender advocacy development. Dorothy shared a story about a former student that she counseled who showed signs of depression and who had been hospitalized and she realized that the girl did not want to tell her everything related to her LGBTQ identity (interview, November 30, 2015). When Rose tried to work with a student regarding gender expression, she shared that “he was not ready...and he cussed [her] out” and she reflected that she felt that she “tried to use [her] counseling skills too early” with her transgender student (interview, November 30, 2015). Catherine reported that she had difficulties in the past building relationships with transgender students related specifically transgender terminology and appropriate use of preferred pronouns (interview, October 26, 2015). School counselors may be deterred to advocate for transgender students if the school counselor is unable to develop the relationship to a point that gender and sexuality conversations can be broached or if the student refuses to work with the school counselor altogether. Based on my experiences as a trainer and researcher, including this study, school counselors have repeatedly shared their frustrations of being unable to open up conversations with some students they perceive as being transgender (interview, November 30, 2015). Even a school counselor extremely competent in transgender culture would not attempt to forcibly extract a student’s gender identity or sexual orientation, because it is not culturally competent to do so and the student may be seeking support related to other concerns. But if the student does have concerns that revolve around their gender identity or with identifying as transgender, school counselors may find themselves unable to professionally and respectfully support the transgender student. Data analysis revealed that for all three school counselors, opening up a conversation with

transgender students which broaches transgender identification can often be a difficult and limiting to transgender advocacy development.

*Transgender terminology and language.* Without trainings, personal experiences, or effective relationships with transgender students, school counselors may not be equipped with adequate transgender terminology or language, which deters school counselors from developing as transgender advocates. During an inquiry group conversation about transgender terminology and language, Rose commented, "Just the language, that's what makes it so hard...I think that's what confuses people" (interview, November 30, 2015). And during the second inquiry group session, Rose also commented she felt that terminology was a barrier for adults working with transgender students and she needed support. All of the school counselors experienced instances of confusion when speaking about their transgender students during inquiry group sessions, especially in regards to correct pronouns and accepting students' self-identified gender identity or gender expression, (interview, October 26, 2015; interview, November 30, 2015). Dorothy added:

And then there's where the fear comes from. For people who are trying to be sensitive, sometimes I think they are scared to speak at all because they don't want to offend someone and then it's like you just get irritated or aggravated because it's like it's just too much. (interview, November 30, 2015)

Transgender terminology and language may create a tension between school counselors trying to advocate on behalf of their transgender students, deterring their advocacy development.

During the first inquiry group session the school counselors were provided a hard copy of a guide specific to supporting transgender individuals. Immediately upon receiving the guide



book Catherine commented, "That is very handy. We have a GSA group and I hear those words tossed around" (interview, October 26, 2015). All of the school counselors offered appreciation for the terminology and language resource guide. Also, each of the school counselors mentioned that names, pronouns, name assignment, and/or transgender language and terminology were issues facing transgender students within their schools (interview, October 26, 2015; interview, November 30, 2015).

Another instance of the complexities of transgender terminology fluctuation and correctness was experienced by myself while conducting this study. I originally used the term transgender, then switched to students who identify as trans, then switched to trans\*, and finally decided to return to using the term transgender. In the end, the term transgender was selected due to its common usage in the literature.

The subtleties of terminology and language in regards to transgender individuals, transgender history, and the current transgender movement have created an intimidating reality for anyone who decides to develop as an advocate for transgender students.

School counselors face several limitations of transgender advocacy including their workloads, a paucity of transgender trainings, and deterrents. The workload of school counselors limits their ability to focus on transgender advocacy development due to countless expectations, job duties, and priorities. Another limitation school counselors face is a lack of trainings focused on transgender students and advocacy development. Furthermore, even if trainings begin to be offered to school counselors, their workload may not allow for a focus on these trainings and advocacy development related to transgender students. Finally, school counselors face multiple deterrents to their transgender advocacy, including unsupportive adults, difficulties building

positive relationships with transgender students, and tensions and uncomfortableness related to transgender terminology and language.

### **Summary**

While the experiences and contexts, including study participation, of the three school counselors were distinct and varied, three common thematic categories emerged from the data: (1) transgender advocacy development, (2) affordances of transgender advocacy development, and (3) limitations school counselors face while developing as transgender advocates. While school counselors face many limitations to their transgender advocacy development, inquiry groups provide successful formats for transgender advocacy development, offering multiple affordances for school counselors. Chapter 5 provides implications for research and practice by examining these three themes.

## Chapter 5 - Discussion

While school counselors are situated to advocate for transgender students within their schools, to date there exists only one empirical study regarding the development of school counselors specific to LGBTQ students and none germane to transgender students (Gonzalez, 2014; Ratts et al., 2007; Ratts & Hutchins, 2009; Singh & Burnes, 2009). This study was designed to explore the advocacy development of three school counselors as it relates specifically to transgender students. The study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. How do three school counselors participating in a professional inquiry group develop as advocates for transgender students?
2. What does this advocacy afford school counselors?
3. What are the limitations faced by school counselors developing as transgender advocates?

The three school counselors in this study participated in an inquiry group focused on transgender advocacy development, including the use of individual transgender advocacy projects called passion projects. The ACA Advocacy Competencies framework was used to analyze and examine the transgender advocacy development of the inquiry group and the individual school counselors. Informed by the study's research design and conceptual framework, three themes emerged from analyses of the study's data corpus. The three themes of the study provide understanding on the transgender advocacy development and contexts of school counselors: (1) transgender advocacy development, (2) affordances of transgender advocacy development, and (3) limitations school counselors face while developing as transgender advocates.

The remainder of this chapter includes a discussion on transgender advocacy development of school counselors and a summary of the findings organized by the three research questions. Also discussed are the implications and limitations of the study.

### **Transgender Advocacy Development of School Counselors**

Singh and Burnes (2009) have asserted that there is a need for school counselors to serve as advocates for transgender students. Indeed, scholarship related to the roles of school counselors have recommended that school counselors move beyond their traditional roles and into the role of advocate, specifically advocating on behalf of transgender students (Burnes et al., 2010; Gonzalez, 2014; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Goodrich et al., 2013; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Hernandez & Seem, 2004; Israel, 2004; Lewis et al., 2000; Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009; Singh & Burnes, 2009; Toporek et al., 2009). Additionally, both the ACA and the ASCA have adopted models and competencies that call on school counselors to serve as advocates for transgender students (ASCA, 2005, 2014; Burnes et al., 2010; Lewis et al., 2003). However, there remains limited research on school counselor advocacy development, only one study specific to school counselors advocating for LGBTQ students (Gonzalez, 2014), and no studies on the advocacy work of school counselors specific to transgender students.

While there is an absence of literature related to school counselors developing as transgender advocates, all of the study's participants developed as transgender advocates. Designed to support counselors in their advocacy development at the student, school, and societal levels, the ACA advocacy competencies was a fundamental component of the conceptual framework (Lewis et al., 2003). Catherine's passion project work introducing a school policy that

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created the district's first unisex restroom moved her from the microlevel of advocacy into the macrolevel of advocacy (Lewis et al., 2003). Through her participation in the inquiry group, Dorothy not only increased her transgender competencies, she also developed her advocacy competencies. She was identified by her principal as a transgender advocate and school expert, which moved her to the "systems advocacy" domain of the ACA advocacy competencies (Lewis et al., 2003). Rose also moved to the "systems advocacy" domain of the ACA advocacy competencies by developing and presenting a training to her staff specific to addressing transgender issues she identified at her school. Finally, my passion project work on tiny rainbow stickers moved me to the macrolevel of the ACA advocacy competencies. The stickers involved training those who asked for the stickers as well as controversy within some schools after distributing them.

Presenting the work of our inquiry group, including our individual passion projects, at the district's school counselor meeting, Catherine, Rose, and myself moved to the macrolevel of transgender advocacy. We were able to share with an audience the successes of transgender advocacy development, in turn sharing the possibility of transgender advocacy development for school counselors. Through our participation in the inquiry group and passion project work, we were all able to develop our transgender advocacy. Presenting at the district's school counselor meeting offered another opportunity for school counselors to develop as transgender advocates. Therefore, considering the absence of research and the lack of trainings, transgender advocacy development is accessible and straightforward for interested school counselors.

As school counselors develop as transgender advocates they benefit from several different affordances. The findings of affordances of transgender advocacy development in this

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study have been categorized into the two themes of internal affordances and external affordances. One significant finding is that school counselors are afforded empowerment through transgender advocacy development and involvement in the inquiry group. Extending Lather's (1991) concept of empowerment, school counselors were able to act "both individually and collectively to change the conditions of" their lives and the lives of the transgender students within their schools (p. 4). Another significant finding of affordances is the impact on the lives of transgender students by school counselors whom develop as transgender advocates. When school counselors recognize a transgender issue within their school, set a goal to address the issue through the passion project process, and utilize the support of an inquiry group, the lives of transgender students are directly impacted. While there possibly remains many more affordances not discovered, this study found many affordances of transgender advocacy development for school counselors, both internal and external.

In addition to the affordances of developing as transgender advocates, school counselors also face limitations to their transgender advocacy development. The workload of school counselors may limit their ability to develop as a transgender advocate: large caseloads and numerous day-to-day job demands. The large caseloads and a litany of job demands facing school counselors is compounded by researchers and professional organizations placing numerous demands and competencies on school counselors, further limiting their ability to develop as transgender advocates. Although researchers and professional organizations place demands and expectations on school counselors, there continues to be a lack of research and trainings specific to transgender advocacy development for school counselors (Gonzalez, 2014; Ratts et al., 2007; Ratts & Hutchins, 2009; Singh & Burnes, 2009). The paucity of trainings for

school counselors is another limitation to developing as a transgender advocate. Locally, regionally, and nationally the only two trainings specific to transgender advocacy development for school counselors were this study and my short 30-minute workshop session for the district's school counselors during a summer conference. The final limitation to transgender advocacy development for school counselors were found to be deterrents. Harmful, intolerant, or ignorant adults; ineffective relationships between school counselors and their transgender students; and the complexity and nuances of transgender terminology and language are all impediments that may deter school counselors from developing as transgender advocates. While school counselors may face limitations, transgender advocacy development is still possible, especially when participating in an inquiry group focused on developing as transgender advocates.

### **Summary of Findings**

The findings which emerged during the data analysis phase of the study were grouped into three themes which corresponded to the study's three research questions. Within each of these three themes are sub-theme findings. Accordingly, the summary of findings is arranged by the three themes of the study, which correspond to the three research question.

**Transgender advocacy development.** 100% of the participants in the inquiry group, including myself, developed as transgender advocates during the study, moving into either "systems advocacy" or "social/political advocacy" domains of the ACA's competencies (Lewis et al., 2003). Through inquiry group participation, passion project work, and small wins, school counselors develop as advocates for their transgender students. Each school counselor indicated that participation in the study's inquiry group assisted in their development as a transgender advocate. The inclusion of individual passion projects to the work of the inquiry group helped

develop the transgender advocacy of the study's participants. And regardless of the magnitude or perceived magnitude of advocacy efforts, including inquiry attendance rates and passion project involvement, all participants were transgender advocates and developed their transgender advocacy through small wins. School counselors are transgender advocates as soon as they begin addressing issues facing transgender individuals in their schools.

**Affordances of transgender advocacy development.** There were several affordances that emerged during data analysis and most could be categorized as either an internal affordance or an external affordance. Therefore, the two sub-themes of internal affordances and external affordances constitute the theme of affordances of transgender advocacy development.

**Internal affordances.** The first internal affordance of transgender advocacy development was an increase in transgender knowledge for school counselors participating in an inquiry group. Using magnitude coding, an increase in transgender competencies scores for each school counselor and the inquiry group as a whole was found. The second internal affordance of transgender advocacy development was a feeling of empowerment. The entire process each participant underwent in order to develop as a transgender advocate during this study coincided with their empowerment process. The final internal affordance of transgender advocacy development was an increase in confidence, specifically related to addressing transgender issues. The school counselors reported that their confidence increased over the course of the study, a finding that correlates with an increase the transgender competency scores found using magnitude coding.

**External affordances.** The first external affordance of transgender advocacy development is a direct positive impact on the transgender students within the buildings and



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school district of the school participants. Impacting the actual transgender students within the school counselors' buildings was a goal of the inquiry group and one of the reasons that passion projects were introduced into the study. The second external affordance of transgender advocacy development is being identified as a transgender expert. Through involvement in a study, inquiry group participation, and passion project work and presentation, school counselors were afforded expert designation by others. The final external affordance of transgender advocacy development is support. School counselors were afforded support from each other as well as the support provided by myself. At the center of our inquiry group work was the concept of support. In fact, during the data analysis phase, the word support was the most frequently coded speech unit and word.

**Limitations school counselors face while developing as transgender advocates.** There are many limitations school counselors face while developing as advocates, including the following sub-themes which emerged as significant limitations: (1) workload of school counselor, (2) paucity of trainings, and (3) deterrents.

The first limitation school counselors face as they develop their transgender advocacy is workload: the amount of work school counselors assume and/or are expected to assume. School counselors have job demands which are directed by the district and the school's principal and influenced by their professional organizations, including ACA and ASCA. In addition to supporting as many as 1000 students, school counselors also support the school's staff and parents. Finally, school counselors must support all parties, including those who are being harmed, those who are doing the harm, victims and bullies. The numerous demands being made of school counselors limits their ability to develop as transgender advocates.

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The next limitation faced by school counselors developing as transgender advocates is the lack of transgender-specific training. The paucity of trainings specific to transgender advocacy development of school counselors exists within this study's city, regionally, and nationally. The finding of a paucity of trainings is also supported by the finding that the inquiry group provided significant support to the school counselors involved in this study and that they joined the study in order to access transgender-specific training.

The final limitation school counselors face are deterrents: harmful, intolerant, or ignorant adults; ineffective relationships between school counselors and their transgender students; and the complexity and nuances of transgender terminology and language. School counselors face adults who act as barriers to transgender advocacy and transgender support. Difficulties working with some adults within the school setting impeded school counselors ability to advocate for transgender students. Another deterrent is the difficulty of building effective relationships with some transgender students. School counselors may be deterred to advocate for transgender students if the school counselor is unable to develop relationships to a point in which transgender issues are part of conversations. At times relationships never get to the point that transgender students discuss their transgender-related issues with the school counselor or the transgender student severs the relationship if they feel uncomfortable with the school counselor. The last deterrent is transgender terminology and language. Without transgender experiences or trainings school counselors are not equipped with adequate transgender terminology or language, which deters them from developing as transgender advocates. For school counselors attempting to develop as transgender advocates there is a deterrence related to saying something wrong, which

stems from a lack of transgender knowledge, specifically transgender terminology and language.

In regards to the transgender terminology deterrence, Navetta (2016) explained:

There's been a lot written about why people sometimes struggle with understanding the T in the LGBTQ acronym, and one of the key indicators that seems to be consistent in any discussion is this: many of us are just kind of hazy on what everything means in the first place. (p. 6)

Many aspects of transgender terminology and language is relatively new and seemingly ever-changing. While school counselors understand that there are some appropriate terms and some inappropriate terms, at times they struggled with being able to navigate the terminology. School counselors may be deterred to develop as transgender advocates for several reasons, including adults, relationships with transgender students, and transgender terminology and language.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the transgender advocacy development of three school counselors in a southeastern urban school district who participated in an inquiry group focused on transgender advocacy development. The findings from this study not only offer important implications for school counselors, but also for school counselor professional organizations and future research. These implications are discussed in the following three sections: school counselors, school counselor professional organizations, and future research.

**School counselors.** It is important to note that transgender students are still in need of advocacy, arguably now more than ever. Schmider (2017a) reported that 2016 was the deadliest year on record for transgender people having passed 2015 for the most murders of transgender

people. At its current trajectory, 2017 will end up being the deadliest year on record, with 15 reported murders of transgender people in the first five months (Schmider, 2017b). Transgender students are also at the center of a national political controversy surrounding transgender students' right to use the restroom of their gender identity, allowing schools to discriminate against transgender students, and other discriminatory political platforms. While a 2017 meta-analysis of suicide attempts by transgender individuals reported rates lower than the commonly used 40%, the article's rate is still alarming at just over 30% (Adams, Hitomi, & Moody, 2017). Additionally, in a comparison between the 2013 NSCS data and the 2015 NSCS data, more students are reporting feeling unsafe at school based on their gender. 60.5% of transgender students reported feeling unsafe at school due to their gender in 2013 as compared to 75.8% in 2015 (Kosciw et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2015). Therefore, transgender students remain in desperate need of advocacy by school counselors.

The importance of having a supportive adult in schools for transgender students is apparent and school counselors remain as transgender students' and researchers' top choice to serve as advocates for transgender students (Greytak et al., 2009). Regardless of limitations and barriers, school counselors must develop as advocates for transgender students because many transgender students are the most at-risk students in our schools today. And while transgender advocacy development may not always be easy, it is a necessary and appropriate job demand of school counselors, one that this study has shown is possible through the participation of an inquiry group focused on transgender advocacy development.

Inquiry groups focused on transgender advocacy development may serve as one school counselor practice that will increase their ability to advocate for transgender students. School

## SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

counselors might experience transgender advocacy development differently depending on their contexts and inquiry group participation level, however development will occur through inquiry group participation. School counselors are able to develop as transgender advocates by taking advantage of an inquiry group practice that is designed to offer support, focus on transgender advocacy development, and work on solving an issue at the school level. After accepting the call to action by researchers and professional organizations to advocate for transgender students, school counselors will find the practice of a supportive and focused inquiry group essential to their development. The key components of our inquiry group success were school counselors who wanted to develop as transgender advocates, meeting four times within a six month period, accepting the challenge of a passion project, positive and supportive collaboration, a focus the transgender students and issues they face in the school counselors' own buildings, and a focus on celebrating and sharing our advocacy work and successes. The power of the inquiry group for school counselors is the support afforded. Through inquiry group participation, school counselors focused on developing as transgender advocates will feel supported, which will increase their development.

Adding passion projects to the workload of school counselors may seem like an unfavorable recommendation at first, but successfully completing a passion projects tends to achieve transgender advocacy development into the macrolevels of advocacy, as indicated by the ACA's advocacy competencies (Lewis et al., 2003). Including passion projects focused on transgender advocacy within school counselors' service extends Lather's (1991) catalytic validity argument, shifting it from research into practice and consequently impacting transgender students directly.

## SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

The limitations faced by school counselors developing as transgender advocates may appear to act as barriers, however transgender advocacy development is possible regardless. While there is a lack of training and research specific to transgender advocacy development, as posited earlier, school counselors are capable of supporting one another through practices such as inquiry groups and passion projects. It is probable that an inquiry group focused on transgender advocacy development does not exist in school counselors' districts or even their state. Nevertheless, it is recommended that school counselors create their own inquiry groups focused on transgender advocacy development in order to provide the transgender students the advocacy they currently need.

**School counselor professional organizations.** There are also important implications for school counselor professional organizations based on the findings of this study. Through the data analyses performed on collected data, this study confirms the scholarship regarding a lack of training (ACA, n.d.; ASCA, n.d.) and a lack of research (Gonzalez, 2014; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010) specific to transgender advocacy development for school counselors. Therefore, it is recommended that school counselor professional organizations, such as the ACA and the ASCA, support the work of school counselors in the field through trainings specific to transgender advocacy development. This includes both national and regional trainings specifically supporting school counselor transgender advocacy development. Another recommendation is for school counselor professional organizations to add to the scholarship related to the transgender advocacy development of school counselors. In the next section of implications, additional future research is discussed.

While there remains a paucity of research and trainings specific to school counselors

developing a transgender advocates, researchers and professional organizations call on school counselors to serve as advocates for all students, including transgender students (Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling [ALGBTIC], 2009; Lewis et al., 2003; Bowers & Hatch, 2005; Toporek et al., 2009; Whitman et al., 2007). The ALGBTIC (2009) suggested 103 different competencies for school counselors supporting transgender students. Lewis et al. (2003) suggested 43 advocacy competencies for school counselors. Furthermore, Lee and Walz (1998) posited “that anyone in a position to make a difference who is not part of the solution to the issues that confront society is, by default, a part of the problem,” placing another layer of demands upon the role of school counselors (p. 307). Adding to the workload of school counselors, researchers and organizations have placed numerous demands and competencies on the plates of school counselors, further limiting their ability to develop as transgender advocates. School counselors need support beyond competencies and research in order for more transgender advocates to rise to the calls of researchers and professional organizations.

**Future research.** Future studies would benefit from extending the scope of this study to include school counselors whom are not as transgender competent or as supportive or accepting of transgender individuals as this study’s participants. This exploratory study recruited participants whom were school counselors with a desire to learn how to develop their support for transgender students and develop their transgender advocacy development. Therefore, the transferability of this study’s findings are limited to school counselors who self-select to participate in a study and who seek to develop their transgender advocacy development.

Further research is also needed on the limiting nature of the workloads of school counselors, especially in regards to their ability to develop as transgender advocates. In future

studies, having more robust data on how the workloads of school counselors effect their ability to develop as transgender advocates will offer additional insights and implications, specifically for school counselor professional organizations. Future scholarship on the workloads of school counselors will provide more solutions to the dilemma facing school counselors: a limiting workload and the necessity to add transgender advocacy development to their workload.

Future studies would also benefit from focusing on school counselors ability to open up conversations with transgender students. This study revealed that school counselors often struggle with opening up a conversation with transgender students that broaches transgender identification and transgender issues. This study's findings support Greytak et al.'s (2009) findings that while the school counselor is the school staff member transgender students felt most comfortable talking with, the students reported that they actually talked to teachers more often when compared to school counselors (Greytak et al., 2009). Perhaps research on school counselors' ability to open up conversations with transgender students will assist school counselors in being able to discuss transgender issues with transgender students more effectively.

Future studies would also benefit from extending the research on the relevance of support in regards to inquiry groups focused on developing their transgender advocacy. While support continuously emerged throughout the analysis of this study's data, the exploratory nature of this study may have missed relevant findings related to support. A similar research design focused on support may produce findings that will extend the findings of this study.

While embedded in the three themes presented in the previous chapter, context served as a framework for data analysis for this study. It is recommended that in future studies the contexts of school counselors be considered in the design of the study.



Finally, future research must address the general paucity of transgender-specific research in schools. At the Human Rights Campaign's Time to Thrive Conference in 2017, the executive director of GLSEN and the director of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Adolescent and School Health discussed the lack of research and data on transgender students and transgender youth during their presentation (Human Rights Campaign, 2017). An exhaustive review of literature found that researchers tend to focus on LGBTQ students and not transgender students specifically. Moreover, some studies' data are incorrectly analyzed by assuming that data specific to LGB students can be reported as LGBT data. It seems that the complexity of transgender terminology which may deter school counselors from developing as transgender advocates may also hinder researchers' ability to effectively provide scholarship specific to transgender students. Transgender students and their advocates are in need of transgender-specific research so as to remove the gaps in scholarship.

### **Study Limitations**

There were two limitations present in this study. The first limitation was situated within the exploratory nature of this study, in that participants did not represent the broader population of school counselors. The study consisted of only three school counselors who self-selected to participate in the study and who were interested in developing their transgender advocacy in order to support the transgender students in their schools. Additionally, the three school counselors exhibited transgender competency at the intermediate level. Specific to transgender advocacy, this study's school counselors were ready and primed for development. Without a complete representation of the broader scope of school counselors, the findings of this study are not generalizable.

The second limitation of this study was the absence of a transgender inquiry group member. Catherine, Dorothy, Rose, and I all identified as cisgender. Although I identify as a member of the broader LGBTQ community, have acquired extensive transgender knowledge and research, and serve as an expert for the district and state as a transgender expert, the fact remains that I am not transgender and I do not have the lived experiences that transgender individuals have. Including the voice and experiences of someone who identifies as transgender might provide participants a clearer transgender perspective, allow questions to be answered specific to the lived transgender experience, and/or provide additional transgender issues which need addressing. Without a transgender participant, it is possible that the inquiry group's development remained situated around a cisgender norms and perspectives. Upon reflection of this limitation, I will include a transgender co-expert in future inquiry groups.

### **Conclusion**

While extant research presents a dire situation for transgender students and implores school counselors to support and advocate of behalf of these students, there are no studies which exclusively investigate school counselors' transgender advocacy development. The aim of this study was to explore how school counselors develop as transgender advocates while participating in an inquiry group. Findings indicate that school counselors have the potential to (1) develop as transgender advocates through inquiry group participation and (2) positively impact the lives of transgender students within their schools.

## Appendix A: LGBTQ Terminology

Included in this Appendix are some LGBTQ terms from Navetta's (2016) guidebook. All school counselors participating in this study received Navetta's guidebook, which was utilized throughout the study.

Term	Definition
Affirmed gender	The gender an individual transitions to in order to affirm their gender identity.
Ally	Typically used to describe someone who is supportive of LGBTQ individuals or rights and who does not identify as LGBTQ.
Assigned gender	Gender assigned at birth based on one's genitals, which may or may not align with one's gender identity.
Bisexual	Someone who is physically, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to men and women, often termed "bi".
Cisgender	A term often shortened to "cis" used to describe someone whose assigned gender and gender identity align.
Gay	Someone who is physically, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to others of the same sex. In most contexts, the term "lesbian" is often the preferred term for women whom are gay.
Gender	A set of norms, often influenced by society, which classify people as either feminine or masculine.
Gender binary	The social concept of only two genders, female or male, in which people must be one or the other.
Gender expression	The way in which people express their gender identity to others through clothing, mannerisms, social interactions, speech, etc.
Gender fluid	Individuals who shift gender identities or who embody characteristics of multiple genders.
Gender identity	One's personal and internal sense of one's own gender, be it male, female, both, multiple, or none.

## SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

Gender neutral	Not having a gender label or identification, such as a restrooms, pronouns, and identities.
Intersex	A general term used for multiple medical conditions in which a person is born with sexual anatomy which do not fit with the gender binaries of male or female.
Lesbian	A female who is physically, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to others of the same sex.
LGBTQ	The acronym of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people collectively. The “Q” can also represent individuals who are questioning their sexuality and/or gender identities.
Preferred gender pronouns	The set of pronouns one prefers to be called, often shared upon meeting someone: she, her; he, him; ze, hir, they.
Queer	A self-identifying term used to describe oneself or one’s community. Used in defiance to society and/or as an umbrella term. Others use it to describe fluid or complex identities. Not to be confused with “Queer Theory”.
Transgender	This term is often used to describe people whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth. Transgender is also considered by some an umbrella term for anyone who does not conform to the gender norms of society in relation to identity and/or expression (Rands, 2009; Stryker & Whittle, 2006; Wilchins, 2004). While the term I have opted to use is transgender, the referenced literature maintains the original authors’ related terminology.
Transition	Discovery or affirmation of one’s gender identity, which may or may not include taking puberty blockers, hormones, therapy, gender expression, or surgery.

Appendix B: ACA Advocacy Competency Domains

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**Client/Student Empowerment**

- An advocacy orientation involves not only systems change interventions but also the implementation of empowerment strategies in direct counseling with individuals, families, and groups.
- Advocacy-oriented counselors recognize the impact of social, political, economic, and cultural factors on human development.
- They also help their clients and students understand their own lives in context. This understanding helps to lay the groundwork for effective self-advocacy.

**Empowerment Counselor Competencies**

In direct interventions, the counselor is able to:

1. Identify strengths and resources of clients and students.
2. Identify the social, political, economic, and cultural factors that affect the client/student.
3. Recognize the signs indicating that an individual's behaviors and concerns reflect responses to systemic or internalized oppression.
4. At an appropriate development level, help the individual identify the external barriers that affect his or her development.
5. Train students and clients in self-advocacy skills.
6. Help students and clients develop self-advocacy action plans.
7. Assist students and clients in carrying out action plans.

### **Client/Student Advocacy**

- When counselors become aware of external factors that act as barriers to an individual's development, they may choose to respond through advocacy.
- The client/student advocate role is especially significant when individuals or vulnerable groups lack access to needed services.

### **Client/Student Advocacy Counselor Competencies**

In environmental interventions on behalf of clients and students, the counselor is able to:

8. Negotiate relevant services and education systems on behalf of clients and students.
9. Help clients and students gain access to needed resources.
10. Identify barriers to the well-being of individuals and vulnerable groups.
11. Develop an initial plan of action for confronting these barriers.
12. Identify potential allies for confronting the barriers.
13. Carry out the plan of action.

---

### **Community Collaboration**

- Their ongoing work with people gives counselors a unique awareness of recurring themes. Counselors are often among the first to become aware of specific difficulties in the environment.
- Advocacy-oriented counselors often choose to respond to such challenges by alerting existing organizations that are already working for change and that might have an interest in the issue at hand.

## SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

- In these situations, the counselor's primary role is as an ally. Counselors can also be helpful to organizations by making available to them our particular skills: interpersonal relations, communications, training, and research.

### **Community Collaboration Counselor Competencies**

In support of groups working toward systemic change at the school or community level, the counselor is able to:

14. Identify environmental factors that impinge upon students' and clients' development.
15. Alert community or school groups with common concerns related to the issue.
16. Develop alliances with groups working for change.
17. Use effective listening skills to gain understanding of the group's goals.
18. Identify the strengths and resources that the group members bring to the process of systemic change.
19. Communicate recognition of and respect for these strengths and resources.
20. Identify and offer the skills that the counselor can bring to the collaboration.
21. Assess the effect of counselor's interaction with the community.

---

### **Systems Advocacy**

- When counselors identify systemic factors that act as barriers to their students' or clients' development, they often wish that they could change the environment and prevent some of the problems that they see every day.
- Regardless of the specific target of change, the processes for altering the status quo have common qualities. Change is a process that requires vision, persistence, leadership,

collaboration, systems analysis, and strong data. In many situations, a counselor is the right person to take leadership.

### **Systems Advocacy Counselor Competencies**

In exerting systems-change leadership at the school or community level, the advocacy-oriented counselor is able to:

22. Identify environmental factors impinging on students' or clients' development.
23. Provide and interpret data to show the urgency for change.
24. In collaboration with other stakeholders, develop a vision to guide change.
25. Analyze the sources of political power and social influence within the system.
26. Develop a step-by-step plan for implementing the change process.
27. Develop a plan for dealing with probable responses to change.
28. Recognize and deal with resistance.
29. Assess the effect of counselor's advocacy efforts on the system and constituents.

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### **Public Information**

- Across settings, specialties, and theoretical perspectives, professional counselors share knowledge of human development and expertise in communication.
- These qualities make it possible for advocacy-oriented counselors to awaken the general public to macro-systemic issues regarding human dignity.

### **Public Information Counselor Competencies**

In informing the public about the role of environmental factors in human development, the advocacy-oriented counselor is able to:



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30. Recognize the impact of oppression and other barriers to healthy development.
  31. Identify environmental factors that are protective of healthy development.
  32. Prepare written and multimedia materials that provide clear explanations of the role of specific environmental factors in human development.
  33. Communicate information in ways that are ethical and appropriate for the target population.
  34. Disseminate information through a variety of media.
  35. Identify and collaborate with other professionals who are involved in disseminating public information.
  36. Assess the influence of public information efforts undertaken by the counselor.
- 

### **Social/Political Advocacy**

- Counselors regularly act as change agents in the systems that affect their own students and clients most directly. This experience often leads toward the recognition that some of the concerns they have addressed affected people in a much larger arena.
- When this happens, counselors use their skills to carry out social/political advocacy.

### **Social/Political Advocacy Counselor Competencies**

In influencing public policy in a large, public arena, the advocacy-oriented counselor is able to:

37. Distinguish those problems that can best be resolved through social/political action.
38. Identify the appropriate mechanisms and avenues for addressing these problems.
39. Seek out and join with potential allies.
40. Support existing alliances for change.

## SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

41. With allies, prepare convincing data and rationales for change.
  42. With allies, lobby legislators and other policy makers.
  43. Maintain open dialogue with communities and clients to ensure that the social/political advocacy is consistent with the initial goals.
- 

*Source: Lewis, et al., 2002*

Appendix C: Study Recruitment Flyer

[District] School Counselors

Fall 2015

# SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

Counselors Supporting Trans Students | Counselors Supporting Each Other

## Times

The study will take place this Fall, August through December 2015. The group will meet approximately once a month for two hours. A set schedule will be distributed at a later date. [Gatekeeper] will help coordinate the meeting dates and times to reduce meeting conflicts.

## Participants

The study is specifically looking for middle school or high school counselors who are seeking support and trainings specific to students who identify as transgender. The group will meet this Fall 2015. The content of the meetings will be focused on growth through trainings, conversations, and shared support.

## Join Us Today

Please contact [Gatekeeper] if you are interested in joining this study. Thank you for your interest.



## Want Help Supporting Students Who Identify as Transgender?

If you have or have had a trans student at your school, are passionate about improving your ability to support trans students, or you want to be on the forefront trans-specific research for school counselors, please consider joining other counselors this fall for a [District]-specific study. Please contact [Gatekeeper] if you are eager to join this group of [District] counselors.



Supporting Students Who Identify As Transgender

Appendix D: Journal Prompts and Questions

	Prompt/Question
Session 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the biggest issues surrounding transgender students?</li> <li>• How should school counselors support transgender students?</li> <li>• Inquiry group goals?</li> </ul>
Session 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is YOUR top priority related to transgender issues? Why?</li> <li>• What type of transgender resources does your school need? What would you like to work on and try at your school?</li> <li>• Scenario response solicited about providing advice.</li> <li>• What type of training do you feel you need in order to support transgender students?</li> <li>• What type of training do you feel you need in order to become an advocate from transgender students?</li> </ul>
Session 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your passion project? How is it coming along?</li> <li>• Has anything happened since our last meeting (2015) specific to trans?</li> <li>• What are your “favorite” resources (book, websites, organizations, people, etc.) worth sharing with the group?</li> <li>• After our last meeting, did you do any work, research, reading, etc. related to people who identify as transgender? Please describe the work you did.</li> <li>• Do you see yourself as a leader in your school when it comes to trans rights and advocacy? Why or why not?</li> <li>• Other thoughts, questions, info, etc. for Jack?</li> </ul>
Session 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your passion project?</li> <li>• How is your passion project coming along?</li> <li>• Reflect on how your passion project makes you feel, especially in regards to yourself as an advocate for transgender students.</li> <li>• Has anything happened in your world since January?</li> <li>• Do you see yourself as a leader in your school when it comes to transgender rights and advocacy? Why or why not?</li> <li>• In your role as a school counselor in this district, do you consider yourself a leader in regards to transgender students and advocacy? Why or why not?</li> <li>• What do you feel you need in order to become a school leader for transgender students? An advocate for transgender students?</li> <li>• What are your thoughts about all school counselors being asked to be advocates for transgender students?</li> </ul>

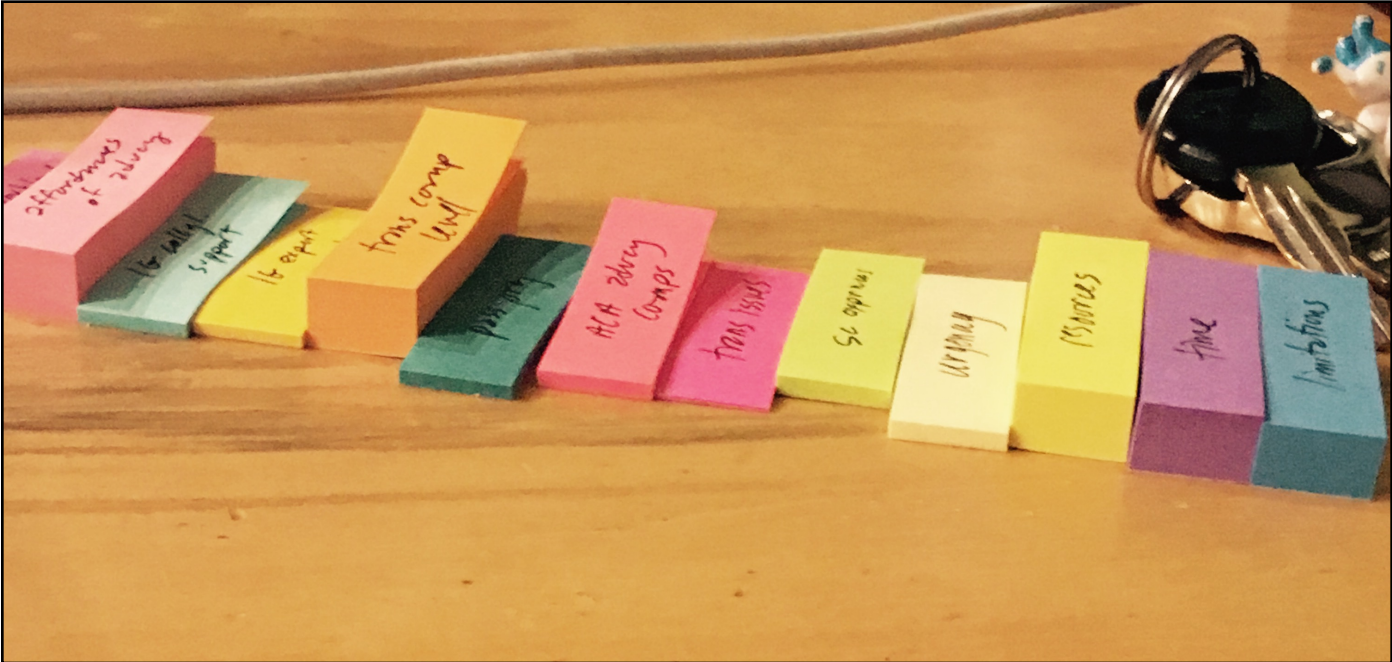
## SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

Final Journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How has participation in this inquiry group supported your advocacy for transgender students?</li><li>• Do you believe that participation in this group has helped you feel more like a leader advocating for transgender students? Why?</li><li>• Compare your current level of <b>confidence</b> as a leader in the advocacy for transgender students to your August <b>confidence</b> level.</li><li>• List three words to describe your experience in this inquiry group focused on transgender students.</li><li>• As related to the inquiry group, complete the following sentences:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- By participating in this group I...</li><li>- Supporting students who identify as trans...</li><li>- My trans advocacy expertise(s) is/are...</li><li>- I will develop as a trans advocate leader by...</li><li>- I wish we had more time to...</li><li>- This inquiry group...</li></ul></li><li>• What do you now feel you need in order to become a school leader for students who identify as trans? A district leader?</li><li>• Additional comments about your experience developing as a leader through advocacy.</li></ul>
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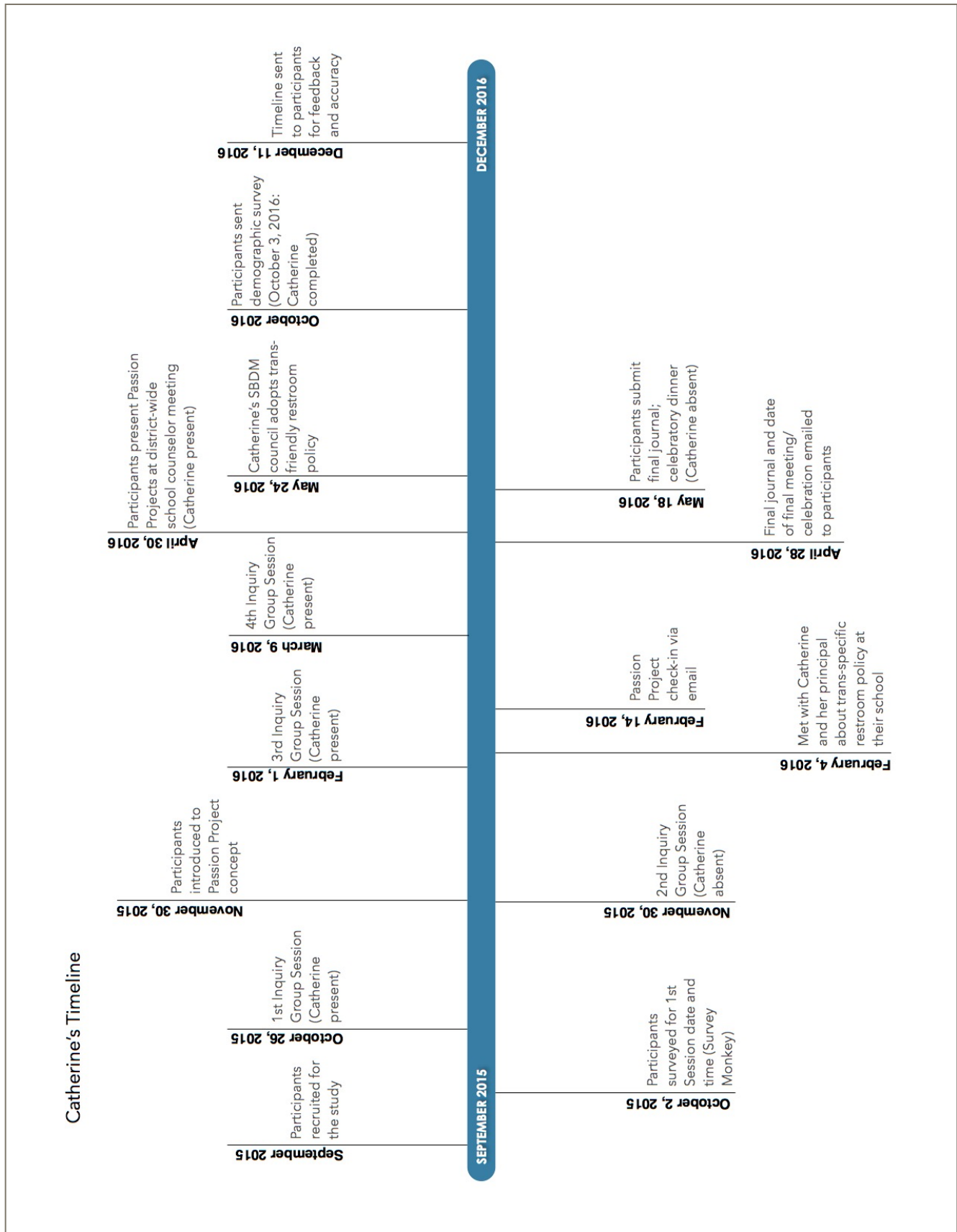
Appendix E: Code Landscaping Visual



Appendix F: Sticky Note Visual



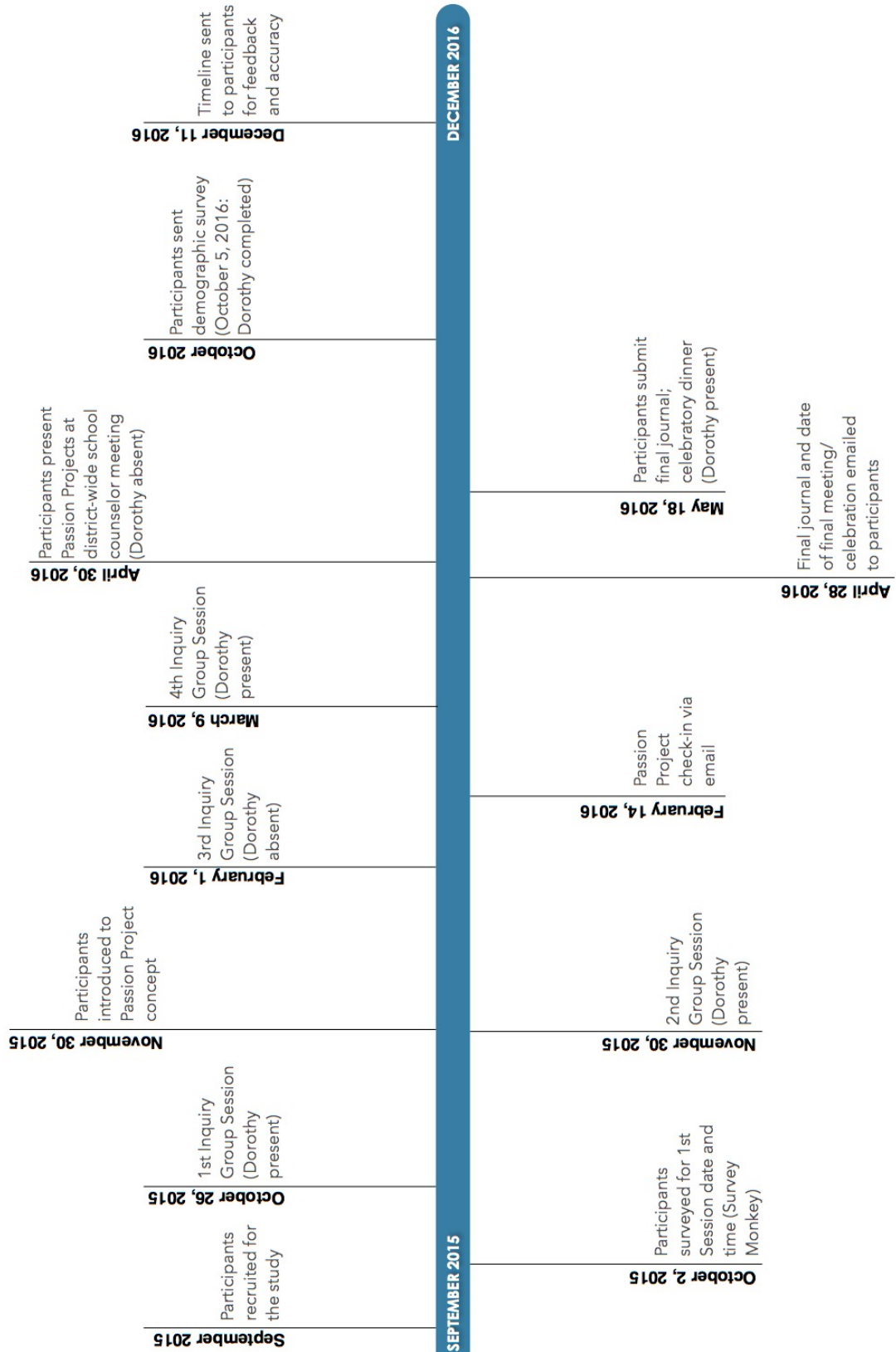
Appendix G: Participant-Specific Timelines





SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

Dorothy's Timeline



# SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

## Rose's Timeline

SEPTEMBER 2015		DECEMBER 2016	
September 2015	Participant recruited for the study	October 2, 2015	Participants surveyed for 1st Session date and time (Survey Monkey)
October 26, 2015	1st Inquiry Group Session (Rose absent)	October 13, 2016	Met with Rose and the assistant principal about trans-specific staff training
November 30, 2015	Participants introduced to Passion Project concept	January 14, 2016	Passion Project check-in via email
February 1, 2016	3rd Inquiry Group Session (Rose absent)	February 23, 2016	Met with Rose (because she was unable to make 3rd session)
March 1, 2016	Rose sends survey to her staff related to the trans-specific training	March 9, 2016	4th Inquiry Group Session (Rose present)
April 21, 2016	Rose presented the work of the inquiry group at conference	March 20, 2016	Rose publishes the work of the Inquiry Group in KCA newsletter
April 30, 2016	Participants present Passion Projects at district-wide school counselor meeting (Rose present)	March 20, 2016	Trained Rose's staff on being culturally sensitive to people who identify as trans
October 2016	Participants sent demographic survey (October 3, 2016; Rose completed)	April 28, 2016	Final journal and date of final meeting/celebration emailed to participants
December 11, 2016	Timeline sent to participants for feedback and accuracy	May 18, 2016	Participants submit final journal; celebratory dinner (Rose present)
		May 18, 2016	Participants submit final journal; celebratory dinner (Rose present)
		November 30, 2015	2nd Inquiry Group Session (Rose present)

SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

Appendix H: Initial Codes

Code	Type	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Total
SC <sup>1</sup> experiences	Inductive	9	5	3	1	18
IG <sup>2</sup> collegial support	Inductive	11	11	4	13	39
IG <sup>2</sup> expert support	Inductive	7	6	17	11	41
SC <sup>1</sup> workload	Deductive	5	11	3	2	21
trans issues	Deductive	22	12	11	5	48
urgency	Deductive	9	6	7	4	26
passion project	Deductive	5	17	6	11	39
time	Deductive	0	1	2	0	3
affordances	Inductive	0	1	4	9	14
resources	Deductive	0	3	7	6	16
trans comp levels	Deductive	18	11	16	7	54
limitations	Deductive	0	2	8	3	13
ACA advcy comps	Deductive	7	6	11	6	30
Total Codes		93	92	99	78	362

<sup>1</sup>School counselor

<sup>2</sup>Inquiry group

SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRANSGENDER ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

Appendix I: Magnitude Coding: Transgender Competency Matrix

Trans Competency Level Session 1	Dorothy		Catherine		Rose		Session 1: Totals		
	Intermediate	Advanced	Intermediate	Advanced	Intermediate	Advanced	I	A	Tot
Knowledge/Terminology	13	6	13	1			26	7	33
Experience/Encounters	7	4	12	8			19	12	31
Attitude/Beliefs/Values	6	3	11	4			17	7	24
Trans Competency Level Session 2	Dorothy		Catherine		Rose		Session 2: Totals		
	Intermediate	Advanced	Intermediate	Advanced	Intermediate	Advanced	I	A	Tot
Knowledge/Terminology	1	2			4	1	5	3	8
Experience/Encounters	3	0			4	3	7	3	10
Attitude/Beliefs/Values	1	2			2	3	3	5	8
Trans Competency Level Session 3	Dorothy		Catherine		Rose		Session 3: Totals		
	Intermediate	Advanced	Intermediate	Advanced	Intermediate	Advanced	I	A	Tot
Knowledge/Terminology			4	1			4	1	5
Experience/Encounters			2	5			2	5	7
Attitude/Beliefs/Values			4	2			4	2	6
Trans Competency Level Session 4	Dorothy		Catherine		Rose		Session 4: Totals		
	Intermediate	Advanced	Intermediate	Advanced	Intermediate	Advanced	I	A	Tot
Knowledge/Terminology	2	3	2	2	2	7	6	12	18
Experience/Encounters	1	3	0	6	0	6	1	15	16
Attitude/Beliefs/Values	3	3	1	3	0	9	4	15	19
Totals for Intermediate & Advanced	39	26	49	32	12	29	<b>Total Trans Comp Speech Units:187</b>		
Overall Total Trans Competency Level Moments	65		81		41				

Appendix J: Example Journaling Form

# Journal Reflection Form

Thursday, April 28, 2016  
Final Reflection


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## School Counselors Inquiry Group Working to Support Students Who Identify As Trans


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Thank you for your leadership. Your dedication and participation in this study will benefit students for years into the future. Thank you also for your leadership through advocacy within our own district.

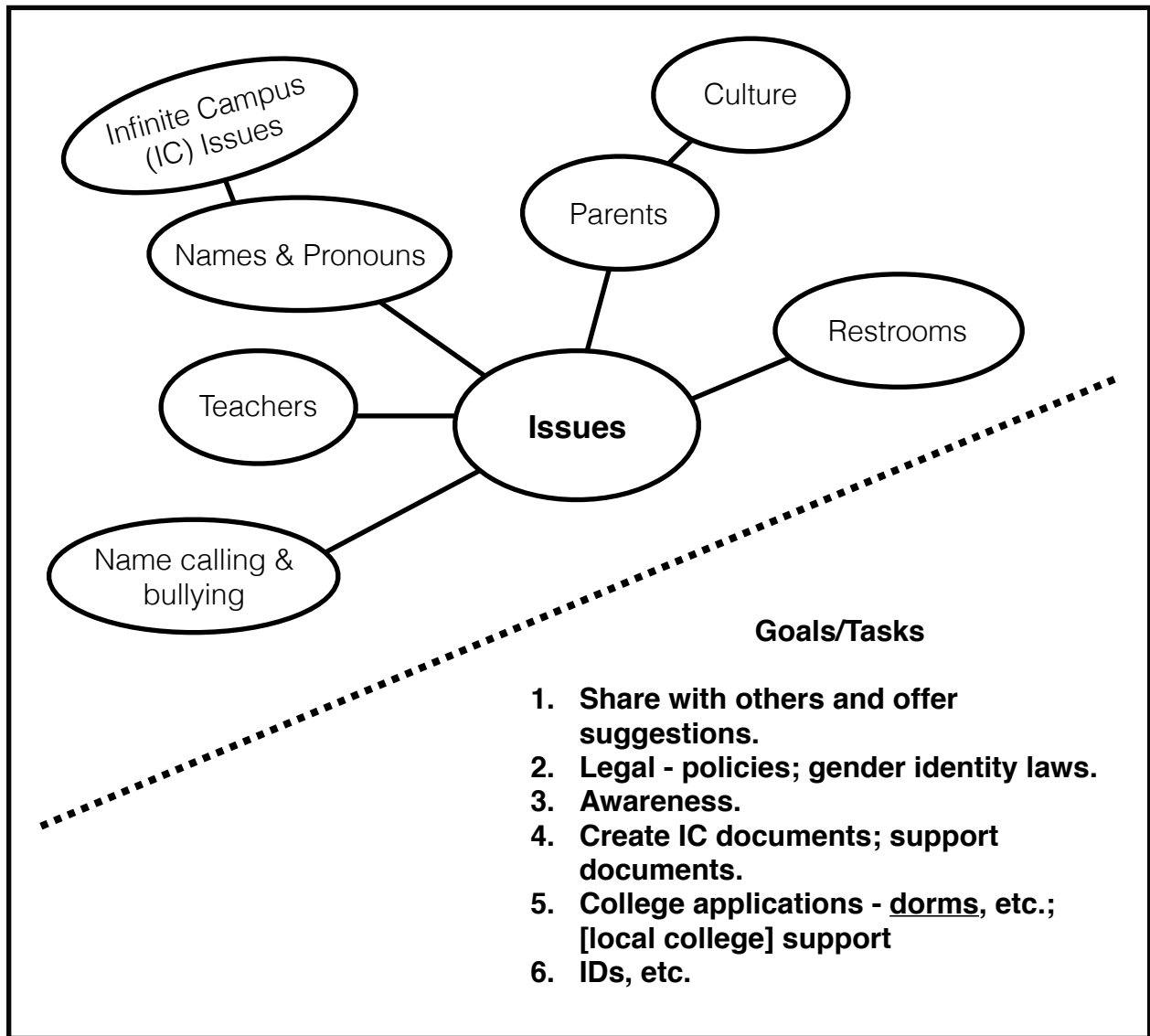
 How has participation in this inquiry group supported your advocacy for students who identify as trans?

 Do you believe that participation in this group has helped you feel more like a leader advocating for trans students?    Yes    No

Why?

 Compare your current level of **confidence** as a leader in the advocacy for trans students to your August **confidence** level.

Appendix K: Inquiry Group's Issues/Goals Chart (Reproduction)



Appendix L: Overall Study Timeline

**September 2015.** On September 4, 2015, middle school and high school counselors within a large urban school district in southeast United States were recruited to participate in the inquiry group sessions. During a districtwide counselor meeting hosted by the gatekeeper, the district's lead counselor, recruitment flyers were handed out to all middle school and high school counselors of the district. On September 24, 2015, with permission from my gatekeeper, I also sent an email to the school counselors inviting them to "please email me" if they were "eager to participate" in the inquiry group and "interested in learning more about supporting students who identify as transgender," (personal communication, September 24, 2015). I also sent an email to nine specific school counselors that had attended my trainings at previous conferences and requested that I contact them regarding additional training and support. By the end of September 2015, I had a list of six participants who expressed interest in the study.

**October 2015.** On October 2, 2015, after approximately a month of recruiting, I sent a survey to the six interested participants requesting input on a meeting date. I provided three date options and asked participants to indicate all dates they would be able to attend. Of the six interested participants, only five responded to the survey that I emailed. Two (40%) of the five indicated that they could meet on October 12, 2015; four (80%) of the five indicated that they could meet on October 26, 2015; and two (40%) of the five indicated that they could meet on October 29, 2015.

On October 21, 2015, I sent an email to all six interested participants to inform them of the date selected by 80% the group. The email included the date, time, and location of the meeting. I informed the participants that at the first session the group would choose the dates of

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the remaining three inquiry group sessions. I also encouraged school counselors to attend the final three sessions if they were unable to attend the first, held on October 26, 2015.

The first session, held on a Monday afternoon at 3:30 p.m. in the district's professional library, was attended by Catherine and Dorothy. The first session lasted approximately 1 hr 36 min. Those in attendance chose November 30, 2015 as the date for the second session, and following a conversation about location, the participants also decided to keep the location and meeting time the same.

Dorothy: So, when are you thinking?

Jack: A month.

Dorothy: So, like Thanksgiving week or after?

Jack: I would say maybe right after.

Catherine: So, the 30th is next Monday. Is that what we're looking at? Monday again?

Dorothy: That works for me...Do you want to do Monday the 30th?

Jack: That's good for me. What about the time?

Dorothy: 3:30 works pretty well for me. I don't know about you.

Catherine: Me too.

On October 28, 2015, an email was sent to the six participants who expressed interest in joining the inquiry group. The contents of the email included (a) another invitation for school counselors to "consider attending the next meeting; (b) the meeting date (Monday, November 30, 2015), time (3:30 p.m.), and location (the school district's professional library). Additionally, the email also promised a reminder email "the morning of the meeting, since you will have had a long restful break," (personal communication, October 28, 2015).



**November 2015.** In early November 2015, following an informal review of the first session's memos and field notes and an advisory session with a member of my dissertation committee, I altered the design of the study to focus passion projects, including the addition of one-on-one support meetings with each participant and a culminating presentation of passion projects and advocacy work by the inquiry group at a districtwide school counselor meeting. These two components were added to the study's existing core element of inquiry group sessions. The three distinct components of the adjusted research design model (see Figure 6) were developed in an attempt to successfully achieve the study's revised main goals of (a) providing participant support related to transgender students and (b) developing participants as advocates for transgender students.

I sought permission for the inquiry group to present our passion project work at the district's school counselor meeting by communicating with the gatekeeper, the district's lead school counselor. The following text is from an email I sent to the gatekeeper on November 25, 2015, in an attempt to promote the presentation idea:

Would there be any way possible for the counselors working in my study to present what they have created for their schools...sharing resources we've created as part of the study? It could be 15 minutes and solely focused on resources to support students who identify as transgender. (personal communication, November 25, 2015).

The date of the presentation was not finalized until February 2016, which is discussed further in a subsequent section.

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On November 30, 2015, one of the potential participants withdrew herself from the group. In response to an email I sent on November 11, 2015, which provided the details for the second meeting, the participant email replied:

I apologize but I must remove myself from the transgender committee. I am not able to commit to the meetings and feel like I am constantly letting you down! It is an important topic that I will continue to support so please don't hesitate to reach out if I can do anything within the community! (interview, November 30, 2015).

This potential participant never participated in the study and never attended an inquiry group session. I removed this participant from the remaining communications related to this study.

The second session, was held on Monday, November 30, 2015, at 3:30 p.m. in the district's professional library. Dorothy and Rose were in attendance at the second inquiry group session. This session lasted approximately 1 hr 50 min. Those in attendance chose February 1, 2016 at 3:30 p.m. as the date and time for the third session. The following discussion revolved around the participants selecting the next session's logistics, however there are also speech units throughout, which point to the difficulties school counselors face when balancing their professional duties:

Rose: February is ACT...or March...beginning of March is ACT. So February might be good then.

Jack: It would be?

Dorothy: If you do early February.

Jack: I was thinking December/January or January/February.

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Dorothy: End of January or beginning of February? Is that what you were thinking?

Jack: I was going to leave it up to you guys. I wanted to have four sessions. I don't want to go beyond that.

Dorothy: Maybe we should do like an end of January, because of weather...and that could end up being a day where we've had a snow day. If we had to push it back. Do you want to try to plan for that?

Jack: End of January?

Dorothy: The 28th is Martin Luther King Day. So, the 25th?

Rose: I'm doing the conference committee. They've already picked that date. Not that you have to do it around me.

Dorothy: Weren't we trying to stick to Mondays, because those are less likely to be meeting days? What about February 1st?

Jack: That's good. And maybe in between you guys can maybe invite me out to your schools and we can talk or I can help you with...

Rose: Yes! Because I want to jump on this to help my teachers. Some of them just need help with terminology. Some of them it's just that simple. They care.

They just don't know what to say, so that creates a barrier too.

At every stage of the data collection, I attempted to remain cognizant and respectful to the needs of the participants, which is why I encouraged date and time selection be determined by those participants in attendance.

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During the second session, on November 30, 2015, I also discussed the passion projects with the participants, informing them of the one-on-one support and the culminating presentation. It was at this session that participants were asked to choose a transgender issue at their school which required them to become advocates to improve the lives of transgender students, to develop as an advocate for transgender students.

**January 2016.** On January 25, 2016, an email was sent to the study's potential participants, which provided the details of the third inquiry group session. In the emails I sent to potential participants, I always tried to include positivity while promoting the inquiry group's work:

Counselor Extraordinaire, Next Monday, February 1 at 3:30 at [the professional library] is the next exciting get-together. I hope to see you there, as transgender students are still seeking support throughout the district. SAVE THE DATE: Monday, February 1 3:30.  
Yours, Jack (Personal communication, January 25, 2016).

**February 2016.** The third session was held on Monday, February 1, 2016 at 3:30 p.m. in the district's professional library. Catherine was the only participant who was able to attend the third inquiry group session. This session lasted approximately 1 hr 10 min. Since Catherine was the only participant to attend this meeting, we decided to email all participants to find the best date for the fourth session.

On February 15, 2016, an email was sent out to the remaining potential participants regarding the date of the final inquiry group session. The date selected, March 9, 2016, was one of three options, and was selected by the participants via an email inquiry.

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On February 24, 2016, after months of collaborating and communicating with the gatekeeper, the inquiry group's passion project presentation date was determined: April 30, 2016. At that time, the presentation component of the study's design became an actuality.

**March 2016.** The fourth session was held on a Wednesday, March 9, 2016, at 3:30 p.m. in the professional library. Although this was the first session not to be held on a Monday, Catherine, Dorothy, and Rose were all in attendance for the final inquiry group meeting. This session lasted approximately 1 hr 21 min. The discussions at the final session were centered on passion project reflections and updates by each participant.

On March 29, 2016, in an email I sent to the three participants who had attended the first three sessions (Catherine, Dorothy, and Rose), I informed them of the passion project presentation details:

I gave [the district's lead counselor's clerk] the title of Leadership Through Advocacy: Supporting Students Who Identify as Transgender for our presentation in April. It was scheduled for the morning. I will send you a preview of the simple handout that we will hand out to the other school counselors. Yay! Yours, Jack (Personal communication, March 29, 2016).

On March 31, 2016, I sent Catherine, Dorothy, and Rose the presentation handout (Appendix K), which listed and described each participants' passion project. In the email I asked the participants to "look over" the handout for "typos, spelling of name, school" and to make sure that their passion projects' "specific description" aligned with their personal description (personal communication, March 31, 2016). All participants positively replied to the email,

including this response from Rose: “Jack, The handout is very professional and to the point! I’m looking forward to our presentation. Thanks, Rose,” (personal communication, March 31, 2106).

**April 2016.** On April 28, 2016, an email was sent to Catherine, Dorothy, and Rose with a final journaling form to be completed by the participants and returned to me using the interdepartmental mail service. In the email, I also included an invitation to a celebratory meeting at a local restaurant, to show my gratitude for participating in the study and for completing the final journaling form. The portion of the email related to the celebratory dinner read: “As a thank you, I wanted to take you all out to a dinner...a celebration of your amazingness. Let's pick a date. Around 5:00 after school one day in May? Send me some dates, please!” (personal communication, April 28, 2016).

On April 30, 2016, we presented our passion projects and advocacy work at the districtwide school counselors’ meeting. Catherine, Rose, and I were the three participants who were able to attend the meeting and present. Dorothy was not able to attend the meeting. The school counselors’ meeting was held in the largest conference room in the same building as the district’s professional library. There were approximately 150 audience members, heavily school counselors, during the inquiry group’s presentation. Our presentation was scheduled for the morning session and we presented for approximately 10 minutes. All audience members received a copy of the presentation handout for the presentation (see Appendix K), which provided a title and a brief description of each participants’ passion project (transgender advocacy work). I provided an overview of the transgender advocacy work that the inquiry group completed over the course of the study and then I discussed my own passion project. I then introduced Rose and she shared her passion project and experience. Catherine was the last school counselor to share

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her transgender advocacy work and she ended by encouraging the other school counselors to contact any of us if they were interested in transgender advocacy support. Immediately following the presentation, both Catherine and Rose offered me heartfelt gratitude for supporting their transgender advocacy development and then we embraced in a group hug (all of this with the audience watching).

**May 2016.** On May 5, 2016, via an email thread conversation, the date and time of the celebratory dinner was set for “May 18 at 5:00 p.m.,” (personal communication, May 5, 2016). While Dorothy and Rose were fine with either of the two dates proposed, Catherine requested the celebration be held on May 18th, because she informed us that “something else is going on here on the 16th!” (personal communication, May 5, 2016).

On May 18, 2016, we celebrated our work together, the success of the passion projects, and our transgender advocacy development at a restaurant. By this date, all three participants completed and returned their final journaling forms to me. Dorothy, Rose, and I attended the celebratory dinner. However, Catherine was unable to attend, so I sent her a \$10 gift card to show my appreciation and gratitude. The three of us that were able to attend were afforded an opportunity to chat and celebrate our work, transgender advocacy development, and comradeship.

**October 2016.** In an attempt to collect more data related to the participants’ demographics, I sent an email with a brief survey to Catherine, Dorothy, and Rose in October 2016. All surveys were completed by October 5, 2016. The survey had the following seven survey items:

1. How many years have you been a school counselor?

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2. How many years have you been in public education?
3. How many years have you worked for [the school district]?
4. How would you classify your school? (i.e. An elementary school that serves K-5 grades, not a magnet school [magnet schools offer unique learning experiences and programs in order to pull students from different regions of the community, like a magnet])
5. What is your gender identity?
6. What is your race/ethnicity?
7. List any degrees, licenses, and certifications you hold.

**December 2016.** During early rounds of data analysis, I created participant-specific timelines (see Appendix F) for all three school counselors. The individual timelines for each participant expanded the overall timeline presented in this section, creating three different timelines which had commonalities. On December 7, 2016, I emailed Catherine, Dorothy, and Rose their individual timelines to obtain participant validation and feedback, also known as member checking (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). I provided the participants some directions on what type of feedback I was looking for and offered an incentive for completing the member checking opportunity:

I have attached a timeline based on the data I collected specific to your experience in the study. If you could check it and let me know if I have captured everything. I would hate to miss something that you did, because your work and time are precious and even more so in this study. You could send your responses as a written email or type them up and email me that document. I really want to respect your time, so if you would be so kind as



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to provide feedback to the attached timeline and question before leaving for break, I will send you a \$10 Target Gift Card. (Personal communication, December 7, 2016).

For each timeline I asked questions specific to each individual participant, mostly related to specific dates and missing information. All three participants returned their feedback by December 11, 2016, and incentives were delivered to each participant by mid-December 2016.

Appendix M: Inquiry Group's Presentation Handout

## **Leadership Through Advocacy: Supporting Transgender Students**

Please feel free to contact any of the following counselors as well as Lois' office for any support you need in order to advocate for students who identify as transgender.

Additionally, feel free to contact Jack Jacobs with any transgender or GSA/GSTA needs.

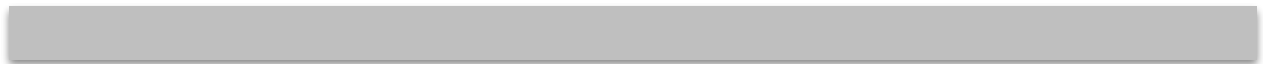
**Rose:** Provided district training and support to her staff specific to transgender individuals' rights.

**Dorothy:** Created a climate and welcoming space for students who identify as transgender.

**Catherine:** Introduced a SBDM policy that supported the needs of students who identify as transgender.

**Jack:** Developed ally stickers for [district] staff to wear on their name badges; Collected GSA/GSTA data for district support.

Thank you for serving as advocates for all your students and for creating a safe space for our LGBTQ students.



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## Appendix N: Thematic Categories and Sub-Themes

Thematic Categories	Sub-themes
Transgender Advocacy Development	Inquiry Group Participation Passion Project Work Small Wins
Affordances of Transgender Advocacy Development	Internal Affordances External Affordances
Limitations of Transgender Advocacy Development	Workload of School Counselor Paucity of Trainings Deterrents

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