

Sexual and Gender Minority Identity Development:

Recommendations for School Counselors

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Abstract

School counselors should be taught about and utilize sexual and gender minority (SGM) identity development models as part of training and advocacy for and with SGM youth in schools. This article reviews several widely used SGM identity development models and provides pedagogical and clinical practice recommendations. Current and future school counselors, including those who train them, are responsible for promoting authentic and healthy human development by reviewing SGM identity development models with students and other school stakeholders.

Keywords: sexual and gender minority identity development models, advocacy competence, school counselors

Sexual and Gender Minority Identity Development: Recommendations for School Counselors

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) position promotes equal opportunity and respect for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (ASCA, 2019). This includes sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth. School counselors, therefore, should be taught about the experiences of SGM people including SGM identity development (Tate, Rivera, Brown, & Skaistis, 2013). The process of SGM identity development is complex (Chase, 2001) and consequently, more school counselors should review and use SGM identity development models independently (e.g., as part of self-reflection in training) and with others school stakeholders (Dimmitt, Carey, & Hatch, 2007). Use of the models also increases the likelihood that counselors will enact SGM advocacy acts (Rabinow, 1984).

Identity

Identity comprises one's roles and values about class, race, gender, and science and spirituality, just to name a few aspects. Identity development is a process of assessing and exploring one's identity and committing to a unified identity. Marcia (1966) developed a four-stage model of identity development. The four stages are foreclosure, moratorium, achievement, and diffusion. Foreclosure is when one has committed to an identity without exploring it. Moratorium is when one has not committed to an identity and is exploring it. Achievement is when one has committed to an identity after exploring it. Diffusion is when one has not committed to nor explored an identity. Simons, Hutchison, and Bahr (2017) found that one's level of commitment to an identity

may be related to level of intentional and actual advocacy activity for and with sexual minority students (i.e., sexual minority advocacy competence).

In a qualitative research study by Simons & Cuadrado (2019), six school counselor advocates were interviewed about school counselor SGM advocacy activity (i.e., advocacy activity for and with sexual and gender minority students). Their SGM advocacy efforts were significantly related to their identities. In another study, Simons (2015) surveyed 398 full-time school counselors in middle and high schools in the United States about SGM advocacy. As part of the study, school counselors provided a response to an item that read, “Based on a definition of advocacy by Singh et al. (2010), to what degree do you identify as a school counselor advocate?” Singh, Urbano, Haston, and McMahan (2010) defined school counselor advocacy as follows: “School counselor advocates view social justice advocacy as a political process. They do not claim neutrality, nor do they fear being unpopular. They pick their battles; are deliberate in selecting when, where, how, and to whom to speak; self-promote; build intentional relationships; and aim to teach students self-advocacy skills” (as cited in Simons, 2015, p. 213).

Participants who agreed with Singh et al.’s definition of advocacy were more likely to have developed SGM advocacy plans prior to the beginning of the school year. School counselor advocacy identity was positively related to school counselor SGM advocacy activity (Simons, 2015). Increased variance in school counselor SGM advocacy was accounted for by higher levels of self-identification as an advocate, and variables tied to school counselors’ internal cues played a significant role in their SGM advocacy. As a result, SGM advocacy training and techniques should also include

intrapersonal activities such as self-reflection over one's own sexual and gender identity development (Simons, 2018; Simons, 2019a).

Having knowledge of the identity models increases the likelihood of self-reflecting about one's own identity development and talking about sexual and gender identity development with youth. In order to assess school counselor advocacy for SGM students, five items were taken from two measures that highlighted knowledge of identity models. The two measures were the School Counselor Sexual Minority Advocacy Competence Scale (SCSMACS; Simons, 2018) and the School Counselor Transgender Intersex Advocacy Competence Scale (SCTIACS; Simons, 2019a). The SCSMACS items are (1) I am knowledgeable of my own sexual identity development, and (2) I am knowledgeable of sexual identity developmental models. The SCTIACS items are (1) The intersection of identities with gender identity (e.g., race and minority sexual orientation) may contribute to additional stress for transgender and intersex students, (2) I am knowledgeable of the transgender identity developmental models, and (3) I have assisted in promoting policies that foster inclusive school environments for transgender and intersex students (e.g., to use bathrooms and dressing rooms and to compete on athletic teams congruent with their gender identity or intersex variation).

McMahan, Singh, Urbano, and Haston (2010) conducted a qualitative study to examine the advocacy identity development of school counselors. Three themes emerged from data collected from 16 counselors: the importance of (a) feminist approaches, (b) racial identity, and (c) self-reflection. To learn more about the relationship between advocacy and personhood, see Fontaine (1998), Sears (1992), and Shi & Doud (2017). SGM students experience harassment tied to their sexuality

and gender identity development. Unlike heterosexual and cisgender students, SGM students have fewer resources, especially those in rural communities (Simons, 2019a). As a result, their cognitive resources are taxed when they are trying to express their internal inclinations regarding sexual orientation in social environments (Waterman, 1982). There is tension in the process of identity exploration whereby his, her, or their identity is in a discordant state (Gonzalez, Sinclair, D'Augelli, & Grossman, 2017). Thus, support for SGM students is important; however, the quality of this support varies (Simons, 2019b).

At present, four states require SGM-inclusive sex education, but eight states do not. Educators in these states are not allowed to discuss SGM identity development in the context of recommended SGM pedagogy. School counselors should also include the voices of intersex people (Simons, 2019b). When SGM topics are discussed in the community, the topic of intersex is often absent. Intersex people are people who experience diverse sex development (DSD) and may undergo surgical procedures (Simons, Gonzalez, & Ramdas, in press). For example, one's genitals may or may not appear atypical, but they are incongruent with a person's sex chromosomes (Lee & Houk, 2008). Intersexuality may be identified at birth, during youth, and in adulthood (e.g., when menstruation is absent).

Sexual and Gender Minority Identity Development Models

Several SGM identity development models are presented including models from Bockting & Coleman (2007); Cass (1979); Coleman (1982); D'Augelli (1994); McCarn & Fassinger (1996); Simons (2020); Troiden (1989); and Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor (1994). These models were chosen for review because they have been widely

referenced and used as part of psychoeducation and in clinical practice. A new model on identity development among transgender people of color (TPOC) is also reviewed.

Cass (1979) Model

According to the Cass model of sexual identity development, sexual identity development occurs over six interactional stages. During stage one, identity confusion, people think they might be gay. During stage two, identity comparison, people compare themselves to others and may act straight. During stage three, identity tolerance, people think they are gay. During stage four, identity acceptance, one applies a label. During stage five, people develop pride and become activists. During stage six, identity synthesis, non-straight people view not being straight as just one aspect of themselves. Heterosexuals are trusted more. Regarding this stage, the musician Elton John sang, "Harmony and me. We are pretty good company."

McCarn and Fassinger (1996) Model

McCarn and Fassinger (1996) developed a stage model focused on lesbian identity development. During stage one, awareness, people feel different. During stage two, exploration, people's emotions strengthen. During stage three, deepening commitment, people's thoughts about intimacy and sex become clearer. People become more involved with the gay and lesbian communities. During stage four, internalization, people affiliate with an oppressed minority group and may participate in activism.

Coleman (1982) Model

The Coleman model pertains to adolescent gay and lesbian identity. Coleman's (1982) model highlights attachments over five stages. In stage one, the pre-coming out

stage, people suspect that they might be gay. During stage two, the coming out stage, people have thoughts about same gender attraction and tell others. In stage three, the exploration stage, people date, and, if they are adolescents, they might show deficits in sexual exploration. During stage four, the first relations stage, intimacy is sought out. In stage five, the integration stage, personal and professional lives are integrated.

D'Augelli (1994) Model

D'Augelli's (1994) model of sexual identity development highlights six phases. During phase one, exiting heterosexuality, people value being attracted to people of the same sex. In phase two, developing a personal sexual minority identity, people work toward achieving socio-affectual stability, countering stereotypes, and creating a sexual minority identity. During phase three, developing a sexual minority identity, people find support and build relationships. In phase four, people come out to their parents. During phase five, developing sexual minority intimacy, people become more intimate without needing role models. During phase six, people join a sexual minority community and may become politically active.

Troiden (1989) Model

Troiden's (1989) model has four stages: sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption, and commitment. In stage one, sensitization, youth feel different. In this stage, individual counseling is recommended. In stage two, identity confusion, youth experience same gender activity. As result, youth may be anxious. Group counseling may be beneficial. In stage three, one may subscribe to a sexual minority identity. Additionally, one begins to disclose and associate with other lesbians and gays. In the

commitment stage, homosexuality becomes a way of life; sexuality and emotions are integrated, love is experienced, and new coping strategies are formed.

Weinberg, Williams, and Prior (1994) Model

Weinberg et al. (1994) proposed a four-stage bisexual identity development model. During stage one, the initial confusion stage, people recognize that they are sexually attracted to the same gender. This occurs along with an inability to place their experience into a category. During stage two, the finding and applying the label stage, people explore what it means to be bisexual and receive support from other bisexuals. In stage three, the settling into the identity stage, people accept themselves and care less about what others think. During stage four, people identify as bisexual with ongoing uncertainty.

Bockting & Coleman (2007) Model

Bockting & Coleman's (2007) model of transgender identity development has five stages: pre-coming out, coming out, exploration, intimacy, and identity integration. In the pre-coming out stage, people experience cross gender feelings and behavior. During the coming out stage, people come out to themselves and others. The coming out stage is challenging for those who have mental illness and few quality relationships. During the exploration stage, people develop new relationships, practice gender expression, manage navigating the binary view of others, and enact stereotypes of the opposite sex. In the intimacy stage, people with anxious attachment styles may struggle with ongoing intimacy. Male-to-female individuals tend to struggle more than female-to-male individuals. During the identity integration stage, people accept themselves more and view being transgender as just one aspect of self.

Simons (2020) Model

The transgender people of color (TPOC) identity development model comprises eight non-sequential processes: self-identification, validation, display, proaction, transition, intersection, passing, and exploration (Simons, Grant, & Rodas, 2020a). The self-identification process is when one identifies as transgender. The validation process is when one learns more about oneself (e.g., by reading books). The display process is when individuals realize that they display gender variant behavior (e.g., tomboy or feminine behavior). One TPOC shared, “I had cut all my hair off. It was a wrap. People were like ‘Her!!’ you know because from behind I had short hair. And I turn [*sic*] around and they are like oh man, and I’m like no, it’s okay.” (Simons et al., 2020a, p. 12). During the proaction process individuals enact behavior based on personhood (e.g., teach others how to use pronouns correctly). The transition process is when individuals choose to take hormones and have surgery. The intersection process is when individuals learn how to cope with being bullied based on other aspects of themselves (e.g., race). The passing process is when individuals selectively disclose about themselves to feel safe. The exploration process is when individuals present as either more masculine or feminine.

School Counselor and SGM Identity Development: Training and Practice

The authors call for more use of SGM identity development models in the training of current and future school counselors so that they are better prepared to teach others about use of these models. Jennings (2014) found that only 78.3% ($n = 47$) of 60 school counselor preparation programs incorporated curriculum content that addressed the coming-out of SGM youth as part of identity development. In addition, some counselors

may think that they should try to change a student's sexual orientation or gender identity. However, this is not the school counselor's role; school counselors recognize the profound harm intrinsic to therapies attempting to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2015).

School counselors are uniquely positioned to identify obstacles to SGM youth (ASCA, 2016a). They also have specialized skills to impart knowledge to educational stakeholders concerning the developmental processes through which marginalized youth navigate during the school-age years (ASCA, 2016a). According to ASCA (2016a), "The school counselor works with all students through the stages of identity development and understands this may be more difficult for LGBTQ youth" (p. 37). Counselor education programs and counselor educators can effectively train school counselors to incorporate models of SGM identity development into their advocacy work on behalf of their students.

Future School Counselors

Professional counseling orientation and ethics courses are good courses for counselor educators to integrate SGM identity development models in educating school counselors and ASCA SGM workgroups could be helpful regarding this process. Educators may introduce school counseling students to their role as advocates for SGM youth (ASCA, 2012, 2016a), to ethical frameworks and competencies that support the uniqueness of SGM youth (ASCA 2016b), and to the Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities (SAIGE). In particular, the authors encourage counselor educators to reference the SAIGE competencies to foster growth and

advocacy for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual populations, as well as to assist with development and use of affirmative curricula on SGM topics that illustrate the developmental trajectory of the different forms of SGM identities (ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce, 2013).

During human development and helping relationship courses, counselor educators could help school counselor trainees understand the coming out process for SGM youth and reinforce that that it is “not up to the counselor to move this process forward or backward but should be the decision of the individual” (ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce, 2013, p. 13). Educating students on the strengths and limitations of only using one SGM identity model is recommended (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). For some people, their SGM identities are fluid, but for others they are not (ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce, 2013). One reason for this difference is intersectionality, having multiple minoritized identities (being SGM while also being part of a racial minority group). People with multiple minoritized identities have less power in relationships than those who only have one minoritized identity. To increase knowledge acquisition for school counselors, counselor educators may invite guest speakers with these identities who are willing to share to students (Simons, 2018; Simons, 2019a).

Afterwards, educators engage the school counseling students by using educational activities such as brainstorming, journaling, and think/pair/share (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Sample topics may include: (a) Describe the individual’s unique identity and coming out process, (b) Discuss the challenges for use of only one SGM identity development model, (c) If this individual was your client, what skills would be necessary to develop an SGM-inclusive space (ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce,

2013)? These questions may be adapted to assessing a school counselor's career aspirations and lifestyle needs. For example, counselor educators ask presenters to share how they experienced meaning with respect to their career selections and dating practices (Simons, Hahn, Pope, & Russell, 2020). The discussion of inter/intrapersonal obstacles and identity at school/work helps future school counselors understand the unique challenges and resiliencies associated with coming out as well as how coming out interfaces with other life areas such as employment (ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce, 2013).

Those who educate school counselors also discuss how SGM identities impact the counseling relationship. To foster reflexivity, educators should utilize the "Awareness of Attitudes and Beliefs Self-Check" from the handbook entitled, *Affirmative Counseling with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, and Intersex+ People* written by Ginicola, Smith, and Filmore (2017). This handbook contains a section devoted to development and identity considerations for SGM individuals across the lifespan (see Chapters 3-6) as well as case examples and structured discussion items that counselor educators may use to strengthen school self-efficacy (Ginicola et al., 2017).

Fieldwork experiences. Combining didactic learning of SGM identity development with firsthand youth experiences while being supervised by practicing school counselors helps prepare future school counselors who are in their final stages of training. Receiving supervision from university, college, and site-supervisors also fosters multicultural skill development. Trainees beginning to work in school settings are more likely to learn how to use SGM identity development models most effectively. A

supportive supervision environment for supervisees to share their fears, concerns, and reactions about doing this while also utilizing the SGM models is recommended (Jennings, 2014). This is important for those who have limited experience working with SGM students because levels of SGM advocacy are positively related to the number of SGM people who school counselors have known (Simons et al., 2017).

A helpful model to assist counselor educators with incorporating SGM topics and identity development is Luke and Goodrich's (2012) LGBTQ responsive school counseling supervision model. This supervision framework utilizes the delivery system of the ASCA National Model to help school counselors and supervisors develop affirming approaches (Luke & Goodrich, 2012). With respect to SGM identity development, university, college, and site supervisors reference a vignette entitled "counseling-conceptualization example." This vignette illustrates how a school counselor trainee works with a student on SGM identity development (i.e., coming out) and offers suggestions based on the approaches of teachers, counselors, and consultants (Luke & Goodrich, 2012).

The stages of SGM identity development could also be taught in a group counseling course. When school counselors-in-training worked with gay-straight alliance (GSA) groups, they reported understanding SGM identity development more (Goodrich & Luke, 2010). To promote knowledge and application of SGM youth identity development models, supervisors may have trainees' select one of the identity models and research how to work with SGM youth within each stage. Lastly, the students may prepare a presentation that details the similarities and differences in experiences from their group experiences with use of the model as well as outline future implications for

practice. As a result, this activity illustrates how to begin exploring the complexity of gender identity and sexual orientation development.

Specialty courses. Counselor educators may integrate SGM youth identity topics in required and elective courses, including school counseling and SGM topics. Consistent with ASCA ethical standards (ASCA, 2016b, Standard A.10.d, p. 5) to “Collaborate with parents/guardians, when appropriate, to establish communication and to ensure students’ needs are met,” counselor educators may reinforce the connection among family-school-community partnerships and SGM youth identity development (Bregman, Malik, Page, Makynen, & Lindahl, 2013). Within a foundations/orientation to school counseling course, faculty members may select empirical studies (see Bregman et al., 2013) that demonstrate the importance of school counselor collaboration with family/guardian members on SGM youth identity development. After students read these articles, faculty ask the future school counselors to develop a list of protective resources for SGM students in various developmental stages (Bregman et al., 2013) as well as outline strategies targeting family/guardian responses and acceptance to SGM youth disclosure (i.e., coming out). It is important for future school counselors to also discuss and practice ways to work with other school stakeholders (e.g., family members) who offer less support to SGM youth. They will also serve as consultants and learn about the effects of systemic neglect of SGM youth in school by educators, including other school counselors (Simons & Russell, 2020b).

Future school counselors also need to have knowledge of SGM identity development and its connection with supportive school environments. School counselors are mindful that hostile school contexts negatively affect SGM youths’

academic, socioemotional, and career development (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). As a result, school counselor educators may work with the next generations of school counselors to develop intentional activities and strategic plans to challenge the events that may transpire during the school year which reinforce the status quo and continued marginalization of SGM youth (Simons, 2019b).

An SGM youth needs-assessment may be developed by counselors-in-training to gather data from stakeholders about their experiences being either SGM themselves or interacting with SGM youth (e.g., intervening when verbal harassment occurs) (Simons et al., 2020b). Future school counselors may also learn about ASCA National Model templates such as the Closing the Gap Action Plan (ASCA, 2020). This document is a useful resource to identify school context barriers, design interventions, and share results regarding ways to strengthen and foster more positive SGM youth identity development. School counselor educators promote an understanding of SGM identity development beyond the classroom, which is done by educating others through facilitating campus activities.

Campus outreach. Volunteering with and supporting SGM-focused student groups and promoting equity for all underrepresented minority groups on campuses promotes healthy SGM youth development and greater awareness of the need for social justice. Specifically, faculty teaching core school counseling and SGM specific courses should encourage school counseling students to attend and participate in campus-wide activities such as safe zone training and counselors for social justice events. School counselor education faculty and school counseling students may work together on these initiatives. Beck (2016) has also recommended that counselor educators work

with faculty in educational leadership to develop programs that future administrators and principals can utilize to better understand SGM youth development.

Establishing inclusive spaces (i.e., in residence halls, career services/programs, and LGBT centers) is another area to address when teaching about SGM identity development (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). Furthermore, the campus community may be unaware of the multifaceted factors (i.e., socio-historical contexts and political considerations) within the college or university environment that stifle healthy SGM youth development. Thus, developing interdisciplinary conversations and events with faculty/staff, students, as well as with institutional leadership is encouraged.

Current School Counselors

Current school counselors may use models of SGM identity development to impact their advocacy work. As a result, the authors propose using the delivery system of the ASCA National Model (2019). This approach may assist school counselors in the development of direct and indirect interventions that reflect SGM youth identity development considerations. According to the ASCA National Model (2019), school counselors should spend 80% or more of their time delivering direct and indirect services. Direct services consist of school counseling curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services. Delivery includes indirect services such as collaboration and consultation. These components together allow for discussion of SGM identity development.

Direct services. School counselors plan and deliver core curriculum lessons that incorporate youth experiences and SGM identity development themes (Goodrich & Luke, 2009). Goodrich and Luke (2009) suggest that school counselors create lessons

on gender roles, identity, and coming out. Curriculum planning and delivery also addresses SGM youths' attitudes and beliefs about themselves with respect to their identity (ASCA, 2014). School counselors are encouraged to refer to ASCA's (2014) national standards to address SGM youth developmental needs. The ASCA mindset standards (ASCA, 2014) support three aspects of SGM youth identity: "(1) Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being, (2) Self-confidence in ability to succeed, and (3) Sense of belonging in the school environment" (p. 2). School counselors can also facilitate SGM identity focused curricula in partnership with faculty, staff, and administrators (Goodrich & Luke, 2009). Accordingly, school counselors may advocate for lessons that incorporate knowledge of identity development within health and sex education classes. School counselors may also collaborate with others in the school to strengthen their advocacy efforts for SGM youth and to remind teachers and parents of the following: "LGBTQ identity does not have to be compartmentalized" (Goodrich & Luke, 2009, p. 118).

Developing personal student goals, college plans, and career readiness plans that reflect the unique developmental pathways for SGM youth is important (Beck, Rausch, Lane, & Wood, 2016). According to Beck et al. (2016), "school counselors help students identifying as LGBQQIA to develop skills to explore the world of work in relation to their identity [as SGM people] as well as to implement strategies to reach their college and career goals with success and pride" (p. 198). School counselors also should acknowledge the need for safety, availability of resources, and coming out in the postsecondary environment and workplace (ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce, 2013).

Support groups and group counseling activities may help to strengthen identity development. They provide a safe place for youth to share information about barriers impeding academic, socioemotional, and college success. For example, if possible, school counselors should advise and provide support to a GSA club and facilitate conversations about youth identity at home, at school, and in the community. GSA involvement provides an opportunity for school counselors to recognize and learn from SGM youth about their own experiences.

Indirect services. School counselors foster and support SGM youth identity development through indirect services including referrals, consultation, and collaboration. According to ASCA (2012), “Through indirect student services, school counselors gather or share information about student developmental issues, problems and successes” (p. 87). School counselors may develop and deliver professional development educator trainings related to the academic, socioemotional, and career development needs of SGM youth. School counselors may consider using the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network’s (GLSEN, 2013) *Safe Space Kit*. The kit contains a host of inclusive strategies for how educators can support SGM youth when they come out during the school-age years.

The SCSMACS and the SCTIACS may be used by current and future school counselors to assess their own levels of SGM advocacy competence (Simons, 2018, 2019a). The assessments include items on the degree to which school counselors make use of SGM identity development models as part of their advocacy. Another resource, GLSEN’s *National School Climate Survey*, provides school counselors with current and relevant data to share with faculty and staff regarding the risk and resilience

of SGM youth (Kosciw et al., 2016). Modifying this presentation for use with parents/guardians, school board members, as well as with community leaders is possible (Goodrich & Luke, 2009). These professional development opportunities enhance how educational stakeholders become more aware of how school climate affects SGM youth identity (Goodrich & Luke, 2009).

Future Research

New evidence-based practices for SGM advocacy should be developed. Research may be conducted that extends the understanding of SGM identity development (e.g., intersex identity development models are needed). These studies are also warranted because SGM research has historically influenced, and conversely been influenced by, research on other minoritized groups (Cass, 1979). Future research could also focus on how the review of identity models and evidence-based practices increase SGM advocacy competence among counselors. Additional studies may be important to understand why an advocacy identity increases the likelihood that school counselors will display higher levels of SGM advocacy competence. Simons et al. (2017) found that the degree to which school counselors identified as advocates for all students was significantly related to the degree to which counselors advocated for SGM students. However, the degree to which this finding was related to one's knowledge and use of identity models remains unknown.

Conclusion

Imagine if you were a student feeling different because of your sexual orientation or gender identity. How might you feel? What would happen? Would you be supported by your school counselor? Would you be supported at home? Answers to these

questions are examples of a few considerations that school counselors should be aware of when trying to support SGM students. Many SGM people report having had negative experiences during their K-12 education while trying to navigate an SGM identity. For some, resources were scarce. In a narrative study, Simons et al. (2019) noted that a former school counseling student who identified as a lesbian shared:

I was actually told by a professor that I had that I would never be able to be an out educator and work in the schools. . . . My response was that if I could not be who I was, I was doing a disservice to the students. How could we let them know that it is okay to be who they are but yet deny or lie about who we were? (p. 6).

ASCA's (2019) position to promote respect and equality for everyone reinforces the importance of having school counselors and school counselor educators who advocate for SGM students. School counselors promote the respect of and equality for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. As such, in order to promote healthy and harmonious human development among all students (including SGM students), school counselors should not attempt to change a student's sexual orientation nor their gender identity (SAMHSA, 2015). Direct and indirect services can be utilized to eliminate barriers impeding student development and to teach about SGM identity models in order to share this knowledge with others.

Not everyone in school is heterosexual and cisgender, nor does everyone understand what it is like to be an SGM person whose identity is met by silence. Use of recommended pedagogy, along with discussions about SGM identity development, holds the potential to limit the effects of this. SGM youth often navigate SGM identity development in the absence of role models and inclusive sex education. Additionally,

many school districts in the U.S. do not allow SGM people to return to their schools years later as adults to share about their school experiences. This is unfortunate because when SGM individuals share about themselves to others, they illuminate our understanding of their experiences and knowledge of SGM identity development.

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