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## Influences of Training and Personal Experiences on Counselor Trainees' GLBT Ally Development: A Case Stud

Shannon L. Lynch

*Sam Houston State University, slw024@shsu.edu*

Rick A. Bruhn

*Sam Houston State University*

Richard C. Henrikson

*Sam Houston State University*

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### Abstract

The goal of this multiple case study was to investigate straight counseling students' perceptions of their preparation to work with GLBT clients. For this study, semi - structured interviews were conducted with six straight counselor education students from two universities. Pattern matching analysis revealed that students with significant exposure to GLBT individuals, as well as those who believed their training provided adequate preparation for GLBT counseling, were more likely to adopt a GLBT - affirmative identity and to experience greater self - efficacy about counseling with GLBT individuals. In addition, thematic analysis revealed seven themes of participants' experiences that fell into four categories. Ideas for counselor educators to incorporate experiential learning into their programs are offered.

### Keywords

GLBT, Ally, Identity, Counselor Education, Counselor Trainee, Case Study, Qualitative Research

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## Influences of Training and Personal Experiences on Counselor Trainees' GLBT Ally Development: A Case Study

Shannon L. Lynch, Rick A. Bruhn, and Richard C. Henriksen, Jr.  
Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas USA

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Literature surrounding gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) issues in counseling clearly has established that the therapist's sexual orientation is important to GLBT clients (Burckell & Goldfried, 2006; Liddle, 1999; Perry & Barry, 1998). Counselors who identify as GLBT have an advantage over their heterosexual counterparts in that they are often perceived by GLBT clients as having knowledge about GLBT-specific issues and to have increased empathy about their struggles due to shared experiences (Graham, 2009). In contrast, GLBT clients often perceive straight counselors as harboring heterosexist attitudes and feelings of homophobia (Garnets, Hancock, Cochran, Goodchilds, & Peplau, 1991; Graham, 2009; Liddle, 1997) and, especially concerning straight male counselors working with gay male clients, as being indirect contributors to the struggles for which they seek counseling (Perry & Barry, 1998).

In addition to GLBT clients' preference for GLBT therapists, researchers also have found that GLBT individuals seek counseling services at a higher rate than do their heterosexual peers (Liddle, 1997; Razzano, Cook, Hamilton, Hughes, & Matthews, 2006), that they tend to participate in a greater number of counseling sessions than heterosexuals (Bieschke, McClanahan, Tozer, Grzegorek, & Park, 2000; Liddle, 1997), and that the GLBT population is steadily becoming more visible in society (Bull, 2000; Gross, 2001). These findings might point to a need in the counseling profession for more practicing GLBT counselors to adequately serve the increasingly visible homosexual population. However, counselor education programs are not comprised solely of GLBT students. In fact, the majority of students in counselor education programs are heterosexual, which means that counselor education programs are producing many new counselors who may be perceived by GLBT clients as bearing the stigma of a heterosexual label. Moreover, counselor education students who are straight may have little or no personal experience with GLBT individuals, and their only knowledge of GLBT issues and clients may come from the exposure to them that they receive in their counselor education programs (Graham, 2009).

The issue, then, is not how counselor education programs might produce more GLBT counselors to meet the needs of GLBT clients, but rather, how counselor education programs can provide adequate training to produce counselors who, be they gay, straight, bisexual, or

transgendered, are knowledgeable about issues that are unique to the GLBT population and who are competent and comfortable in working with GLBT clients. Bieschke and Matthews (1996) underscored the need for such counselors, and they extended the description of GLBT-competent counselors by describing them as *affirmative*, which means that they espouse more than simply an absence of harmful and negative behaviors and attitudes toward, and a mere *acceptance* of, GLBT clients, but that they also *value* them as individuals and behave in ways that convey this.

Researchers in the fields of counselor education and psychology have been calling loudly for the integration of GLBT education into training programs over the past two decades (Israel & Selvidge, 2003; Matthews, 2005; Tyler, Jackman-Wheitner, Strader, & Lenox, 1997; Whitman, 1995). In response to their call, professional organizations such as the American Counseling Association (ACA), the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), the Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling (ALGBTIC), and the American Psychological Association (APA) have revised their standards to promote counselors' understanding of multicultural issues, including those pertaining to sexual minorities, and their practice of ethical counseling with diverse populations (ACA, 2005; ALGBTIC, 2009; APA, 2000; CACREP, 2009). Moreover, some counselor educators and psychologists have been attempting to train students for working with GLBT clients, either by incorporating GLBT topics into multicultural classes (Israel & Selvidge, 2003) or by infusing GLBT education throughout the entire curricula of a counseling or psychology program (Ponterotto, 1997).

A handful of recent studies have shown that, while counselor education and psychology programs are making progress toward producing GLBT-competent counselors (Sherry, Whiled, & Patton, 2005), and while counselor education departments are becoming more affirming of sexual minorities (Beals, 2007), counseling and psychology students still generally believe they are graduating from their programs inadequately prepared to meet the needs of GLBT clients (Graham, 2009; Murphy, Rawlings, & Howe, 2002; Sherry et al., 2005). A study by Graham (2009) that included both GLBT and heterosexual counselors-in-training indicated that GLBT counseling students leave their programs feeling more prepared to work with homosexual clients than their heterosexual counterparts, largely due to their own experiences with sexual identity development. Yet, as previously noted, there is a need for *all* counselors-in-training, not just those who identify as GLBT, to enter the field as GLBT - competent counselors.

To date, minimal research has been conducted strictly to investigate straight counselor education students' training for working with clients of the GLBT population or their ally development training. As defined by Lynch and McMahan-Klosterman (2006), an ally is "a person from a position of privilege who acts with and is aligned with individuals or groups who are oppressed and marginalized" (p. 126). According to the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009), counselor educators in accredited counseling programs must equip graduate students not only with knowledge of "theories, approaches, strategies, and techniques shown to be effective when working with specific populations" (p. 32), but also with skills to "Advocate for policies, programs, and services that are equitable and responsive to the unique needs of clients" (p. 32; i.e., ally development training).

One study of note on the topic of ally development training was conducted by Ji, Du Bois, and Finnessy (2009). Using multicultural counseling theory (MCT), social identity theory (SIT), and self-concept formation theory (SCFT) as a comprehensive framework for GLBT ally development, Ji et al. (2009) created and implemented a GLBT ally course used for training heterosexual students to become GLBT allies. The course consisted of weekly lectures, GLBT-themed activities, and student presentations of GLBT topics. Following each

assignment, students wrote two-page reaction papers. At the completion of the course, Ji et al. conducted a qualitative analysis of the students' papers to identify themes related to the students' experiences of becoming allies.

Multicultural counseling theory (MCT) posits that, for effective interactions with minority group members, members of a majority group need to acquire appropriate attitudes toward, knowledge of, and skills for working with the minority group (Arrendondo, 1999). Regarding attitudes, Ji et al. (2009) found that the students in their study were eager to explore a multitude of GLBT-related topics. Some expressed an internal conflict regarding the juxtaposition of an ally identity with their religious beliefs, but students generally expressed a sincere desire to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively counsel GLBT clients. During the course, the acquisition of knowledge about GLBT-related issues occurred in a variety of ways for the students. For one particular assignment, students were required to interview a member of the GLBT community. Ji et al. (2009) found that, despite their willingness to conduct the interviews, students expressed that it was important for them to feel safe with their interviewees due to insecurities about their skills set for working with GLBT individuals. An important finding in the study was that students believed that having direct, personal experiences with members of the GLBT population was an effective way to gain necessary skills for working with GLBT clients.

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to expound on Ji et al.'s (2009) research regarding straight students' development in becoming GLBT allies. Specifically, it explored further the ways in which straight counselors-in-training believe their personal experiences with GLBT individuals contribute to their sense of self-efficacy and preparation for working with GLBT clients, as well as their perceptions regarding the adequacy of GLBT training in their counselor education programs. The findings add to the existing knowledge of heterosexual GLBT ally development and inform counselor educators of effective strategies for improving GLBT training in counselor education programs.

For the purpose of this paper, the term *stray* (i.e., a juxtaposition of the terms *straight* and *gay*) is used to describe a straight counselor who holds basic knowledge of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues and a sense of competence in working with GLBT clients. In addition, a stray counselor is one who demonstrates affirmative behaviors with GLBT individuals as described by Bieschke and Matthews (1996). However, a clear demarcation is asserted between a stray counselor and an ally. The demarcation is necessary because the term *ally* implies counselor advocacy on behalf of not only GLBT clients, but also on behalf of the GLBT population as a whole, as asserted by Kendall (2001) when he explained that to don the role of ally carries the responsibility of verbalizing one's beliefs regarding the marginalized community in all identities and roles. The authors of this study sought to investigate not only students' basic sense of counselor competency with GLBT clients (i.e., identification as a stray counselor), but also their perceptions of themselves as allies with the GLBT community. Therefore, the term *stray counselor* is clearly differentiated from the term *ally* and is presented as a means of identifying straight counselors who hold a sense of competence in working with, and who hold basic knowledge of, clients who are members of the GLBT community.

The aforementioned definitions are presented to establish a hierarchy of GLBT-affirmative identities. Per social identity theory (SIT; Burke & Tully, 1977), an individual chooses to identify himself or herself to others based on a set of internalized meanings applied to the self. The internalized meanings are formed as a result of social interactions. Whether or not an individual will associate with and identify themselves as a member of a social group is determined by the quality of interactions with members of that group (Burke & Tully, 1977). Furthermore, each person possesses multiple identities, which are internally arranged in an identity hierarchy. Identities that are more salient than others and that are more congruent

with a person's actions and interpersonal experiences will hold higher rankings on the identity hierarchy and ultimately will be chosen for presentation to the external world (Burke & Tully, 1977). With SIT as the theoretical framework, and keeping in mind that the *quality* of interactions with members of a social group determines an individual's adoption of an identity with that group, the term *stray counselor* is presented to identify a developmental point between a non-GLBT affirmative identity and a GLBT ally identity in the identity hierarchy.

In contemporary literature, the term LGBTQ has been used to reference individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning (Singh & Shelton, 2011). Others have expanded the acronym to LGBTQQA to also include those who identify as queer and those who are allied to the gay community (Snively, 2003). However, the American Counseling Association (ACA), "the world's largest association exclusively representing professional counselors in various practice settings" (ACA, 2011, para. 1), uses only the specific terms, *lesbian*, *gay*, *bisexual*, and *transgender* (i.e., GLBT), in their language regarding ethical practice with non-heterosexual individuals (ACA, 2005). In keeping with the language of the ACA, the term *GLBT* will be used in this study to explore straight counselor education students' knowledge of and preparation for working with non-heterosexual clients.

Because contemporary counseling standards dictate that counseling practitioners demonstrate both multicultural competencies and social justice agendas in their practice, counselor educators must be informed of appropriate training methods for use in multicultural instruction in their programs. Presently, a dearth of information exists to inform counselor educators of factors that contribute to straight counselor education students' acquisition of attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for GLBT-competent counseling. In addition, very little is known about straight students' GLBT-affirmative identity development, or about andragogical practices that might be useful for ally development training in counselor education programs. Because investigation of heterosexual students' preparation for working with GLBT clients has been, and continues to be, in an exploratory phase, the limited studies that exist on the topic have been predominantly (if not wholly) qualitative in nature (e.g., Beals, 2007; Burckell & Goldfried, 2006; Graham, 2009; Israel & Selvidge, 2003; Ji et al., 2009; Lynch & McMahon-Klosterman, 2006; Matthews, 2005; Sherry et al., 2005). The exploratory case study approach used in this research was designed to expand on prior studies pertaining to heterosexual counseling students' perceptions of the ways in which their graduate programs, as well as their personal experiences with GLBT individuals, prepare them for GLBT-competent counseling. The results of this study strengthen the foundation of knowledge on which counselor educators might rely to guide andragogical practices for GLBT training in their programs, and on which researchers might base related studies in the future.

The overarching question for this case study research was: How are straight counselors-in-training prepared for counseling GLBT clients? The sub-questions sought to explore the ways in which students believe their counselor education programs, as well as their personal experiences with GLBT individuals, have contributed to students' preparation for working with the GLBT population and included: (a) How do straight counselor education students believe their graduate programs have trained them for working with GLBT clients?; (b) What part does personal experience with GLBT individuals contribute to straight counselor education students' preparedness for working with GLBT clients?; (c) In what ways do straight counselors-in-training believe they could be better prepared for working with LGB clients?; (d) How might students perceive themselves as stray counselors?; and (e) What factors contribute to a stray counselor identity versus an ally identity?

## **Researcher Context**

This study is of particular interest to the primary author, who is a straight doctoral student in a CACREP-accredited counselor education program. The first author is also a friend and family member of GLBT individuals and is a social justice advocate for the GLBT population. The second author is a straight counselor educator who supervises and counsels from a multicultural agenda. The third author is an advocate for the GLBT population and has served as a volunteer for several GLBT organizations. His best friend is a gay male in a committed relationship, and he serves as an advocate for GLBT issues in the counseling profession.

## **Method**

A holistic multiple-case study research design (Yin, 2009) was used to conduct this study. In case study research, a multiple-case study is the preferred method when the researcher seeks to use replication logic, which involves choosing cases for which similar results (i.e., literal replication) or contrary results (i.e., theoretical replication) are expected. The use of replication logic lends greater internal validity to the study and yields results that are more robust in nature (Yin, 2009). A holistic study is used when each case will be analyzed as a holistic unit apart from the other cases (Yin, 2009).

## **Participant Recruitment**

Prior to participant recruitment, the researchers obtained permission from their Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects to conduct the study. Participants were recruited via criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) from two public universities in Texas, one CACREP-accredited and the other non-CACREP-accredited. Specifically, the first author contacted an instructor of the master-level counseling field practicum course at each university to request permission to present the study to field practicum students and to schedule a visit to each university. Subsequently, the first author drove to each university on the respective agreed-upon dates and presented the study to the instructors' field practicum students. Following an introduction to the study, the first author explained the criteria for participation, which were:

- enrollment in a Masters-level counselor education program at the time of the study,
- enrollment in a field practicum course in one of their last two semesters preceding graduation,
- pursuit of either a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) license, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) license, or a school counselor certification,
- completion of a multicultural counseling course in their counselor education program, and
- a self-identified heterosexual orientation.

Individuals who met the criteria for eligibility and who also indicated an interest in participation were asked to read an informed consent document and to offer signed consent. Ultimately, six eligible individuals (i.e., cases) volunteered to participate (three from each university).

## Instrument

The demographics questionnaire consisted of 10 questions, some multiple-choice and some open-ended. The questionnaire was used to collect demographic data about individual characteristics, such as age, race and ethnicity, religious affiliation, and gender. The questionnaire also included questions that addressed sexual orientation and participants' information regarding their specific counseling programs.

The first author conducted all interviews using a case study protocol. "The protocol is a major way of increasing the *reliability* of case study research and is intended to guide the investigator in carrying out the data collection from a single case" (Yin, 2009, p. 79). The protocol contained not only the interview questions, but also the procedures and general rules to follow when conducting the interviews (Yin, 2009). Interview questions on the protocol included the following:

- *How knowledgeable are you about GLBT issues?*
- *Describe the ways in which your counselor education program has provided training about GLBT issues.*
- *Do you have any personal experiences that have contributed to your understanding of GLBT issues and clients?*
- *How have your views of homosexuality changed since the time you began your training in counselor education?*
- *How might your views of homosexuality affect the ways in which you work with GLBT clients?*
- *Overall, how prepared are you to work with GLBT clients?*
- *How could you have been better prepared for working with GLBT clients?*
- *With which term, if either, do you more closely identify, stray counselor or ally?*

Operational definitions for the terms *stray counselor* and *ally* were included on the protocol. During each interview, the interviewer presented the definitions prior to the last interview question to ensure standardization of participant understanding.

## Data Collection

Prior to collecting data, the first author conducted a pilot case study with one participant for the purpose of "refin[ing] data collection plans with respect to both content of the data and the procedures to be followed" (Yin, 2009, p. 92). The pilot case study was conducted a priori to the interviews conducted with the study participants at their respective universities.

On the days the study was presented to students, the first author gave the participants the demographics questionnaire to complete immediately following collection of their informed consent documents. The first author then conducted a focused one-on-one interview with each participant in a nearby empty classroom during the students' regularly-scheduled class sessions. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. To protect confidentiality, the first author instructed all participants to choose pseudonyms to identify themselves during interviews. The first author referred to participants by their pseudonyms on all written documentation, with the exception of the informed consent document, which the first author personally collected from participants and subsequently stored in a locked cabinet. All interviews were video-recorded, and the first author noted participants' responses on the case study protocol as a second means of documenting the content of the interviews. The first



author transcribed from the videos following each day of interviewing. She then viewed the videos for comparison with the transcriptions. Subsequent to data analysis, all video-recordings were properly destroyed.

## Data Analysis

As Patton (2002) explained, “Sometimes...qualitative analysis is first deductive.... After or alongside this deductive phase of analysis, the researcher strives to look at the data afresh for undiscovered patterns and emergent understandings” (p. 454). Adopting Patton’s premise, we chose to use pattern matching (Yin, 2009) to compare each individual case with predicted patterns (i.e., deductive analysis). Guided by the overarching research question (i.e., *How are straight counselors-in-training prepared for counseling GLBT clients?*), we predicted four patterns, stated as propositions, as our first data analysis strategy for case study research (Yin, 2009). As Yin explained, “If the patterns [of participants’ experiences] coincide [with empirically-predicted patterns], the results can help a case study to strengthen its internal validity” (p. 136).

Considering our interest in the parts that counselor training and personal experience with GLBT individuals play in trainees’ ally identity development, we developed four propositions, each with the equivalent of two “independent variables” and one “dependent variable”, to predict the likelihood that a counselor trainee would identify as a stray counselor, a GLBT ally, or neither. The propositions were guided theoretically by both multicultural counseling theory and social identity theory. The first independent variable, *a significant relationship with or exposure to GLBT individual(s)*, was based on Ji et al.’s (2009) finding that students believe that having personal experiences with members of the GLBT population is an effective way of gaining skills for working with GLBT clients. The second independent variable, *adequate training regarding GLBT issues in counselor education programs*, was based on the MCT premise that knowledge of a minority group is necessary for effective interactions with the minority group’s members (Arrendondo, 1999). Each proposition had one predicted outcome (the dependent variable), which was selected from the following: stray counselor identity, ally identity, and neither.

Proposition 1 predicted that the combination of personal experiences with GLBT individuals and adequate GLBT training in counselor education programs would provide the optimal opportunity for students to gain the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to cultivate a GLBT ally identity. Propositions 2 and 3 both predicted that, in the absence of one of the independent variables, students would fall short of adopting a GLBT ally identity. Instead, they might opt for the lower GLBT-affirmative identity, stray counselor. The prediction of the outcomes of these propositions was derived from Ji et al.’s (2009) finding that, although heterosexual students might hold affirmative attitudes toward GLBT individuals, they might also feel somewhat insecure about their skills set for working with GLBT clients when they lack a strong foundational knowledge about GLBT topics. Proposition 4 predicted that students who had not had personal experiences with GLBT individuals and had not received adequate GLBT training in their counselor education programs would adopt neither a stray counselor nor a GLBT ally identity. This proposition was congruent with the MCT tenet that majority group members who do not acquire necessary knowledge of, and skills for working with, members of a minority group will not be able to work effectively with members of that group (Arrendondo, 1999). Also, because the experiences symbolized by the fourth proposition do not include interactions with members of the GLBT population, the proposition is also congruent with the SIT premise that adoption of a social group identity is determined by the quality of interactions one has with members of that social group (Burke & Tully, 1977).

The first author conducted the pattern-matching analysis. As Yin (2009) explained, “the actual pattern-matching procedure involves no precise comparisons” (p. 140) and is at the discretion of the researcher. To begin the process of analysis, the author read through all transcriptions to get a sense of the data as a whole (Patton, 2002). Subsequently, she compiled a case description for each case. “The case record [description] includes all the major information that will be used in doing the final case analysis and writing the case study” (Patton, 2002, p. 449). Each case description was constructed by editing raw data from transcripts, removing redundancies, and fitting parts together to produce a complete, yet manageable, record of the case (Patton, 2002). The case descriptions then were e-mailed to the participants to verify their accuracy. Revisions to the descriptions were made based on participants’ responses.

After verifying case descriptions with participants, the first author compared each case to the four propositions, which focused attention on data pertaining to the variables of interest in the study (Yin, 2009): (a) students’ personal experiences with members of the GLBT population (independent), (b) students’ GLBT training in their graduate programs (independent), and (c) the students’ adoption of a GLBT-affirmative identity (dependent). To begin this process, the first author identified evidence from the case descriptions that pertained to each variable. She then compiled the evidence from all cases into a matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to organize information for the purpose of identifying patterns. A pattern for each case was derived from forming conclusions based on the evidence for each variable that was presented in the matrix. For the first independent variable, it was concluded that students either *had* or *had not* had significant relationships with or exposure to GLBT individuals in their personal lives. For the second independent variable, it was concluded that students either *had* or *had not* received adequate GLBT training in their graduate programs. For the dependent variable (i.e., students’ adoption/non-adoption of a GLBT-affirmative identity), conclusions were drawn from participants’ statements of self-identification with one of three identities: *GLBT ally*, *stray counselor*, or *neither*. Once a pattern was identified for each case, the patterns were compared with the theoretical propositions posed at the outset of the study.

To refrain from inadvertently shaping the findings during the process of data analysis, the first author intentionally searched for evidence in the data to support explanations not presented in the initial propositions (Patton, 2002). The consideration of rival conclusions is a process of searching for the “best fit” (Patton, 2002, p. 553) for the data by weighing evidence and “looking for those patterns and conclusions that fit the preponderance of data” (Patton, 2002, p. 553). By engaging in this process, the researcher increases the rigor of the analysis and enhances credibility of the findings (Patton, 2002).

Subsequent to pattern matching, thematic analysis (Patton, 2002) was conducted to identify underlying themes presented through the data that would not have been detected with the use of pattern matching alone. Specifically, we were interested in emerging themes that described participants’ experiences regarding GLBT training in their graduate programs, exposure to GLBT individuals in their personal lives, and stray counselor and ally identity. For this study, themes were inductively identified. To begin this process, the first author read through the entire data set several times (Patton, 2002). Then, she analyzed the data for convergence, which involved identifying recurring regularities in the data that she later sorted into categories (Guba, 1978; Patton, 2002). She then moved “back and forth between the data and the classification system to verify the meaningfulness and accuracy of the categories and the placement of data in categories” (Patton, 2002, p. 466). After categories had been definitively determined, the first author assessed them for completeness and reproducibility (Guba, 1978; Patton, 2002). Finally, she examined the data for divergence (Guba, 1978),

which Patton described as “fleshing out” (p. 466) the categories through the process of extending, bridging, and surfacing the data to the point of exhaustion (Guba, 1978). The first author determined that saturation had been met when the introduction of new data led to redundancy and yielded no new information (Guba, 1978; Patton, 2002).

The goal of each analysis in the study design was to enhance the findings of the other and to ultimately yield richer, stronger evidence. In essence, pattern matching was used to examine the structure of participants’ experiences, and thematic analysis was used to uncover their collective voice. The researchers were able to explore not only the patterns of experience that contributed to stray counselor and ally identity development, but also participants’ descriptions of those lived experiences.

## Results

The six participants in this study, five women and one man, ranged in age from 23 to 57, with an average age of 34. All of the participants were White, and all of them identified Christianity as their religious or spiritual faith. Three participants were in a CACREP-accredited program, and three were in a non-CACREP-accredited program. All participants were pursuing a LPC license. One participant was pursuing a school counselor certificate in addition to a LPC license, and one was pursuing both a LMFT and a LPC license. Each participant was evaluated as a holistic case.

### Pattern Matching

In a case study, when rival propositions that predict contrasting results for anticipatable reasons are posed at the outset, researchers seek to establish theoretical replication in data analysis (Yin, 2009). The concern “is with the overall pattern of results and the degree to which the observed pattern matches the predicted one” (Yin, 2009, p. 140).

**Proposition 1.** After comparing each case with the initial propositions, it was found that none of the cases supported Proposition 1, which stated that participants who report significant relationships with or exposure to GLBT individuals in their personal lives and who also report adequate training regarding GLBT issues in their programs will adopt an ally identity. The results do not imply that the proposition was invalid. Rather, it was impossible to assess the legitimacy of the proposition, because there was no case in the study that reported both of the independent variables (i.e., significant relationships with or exposure to GLBT individuals in their personal life and adequate training regarding GLBT issues in their program) necessary for comparison. In future studies, the inclusion of cases that present both of these variables could offer important information about the roles that personal experience with GLBT individuals and adequate program training play in counselor ally identity.

**Proposition 2.** The second proposition stated that participants who report significant relationships with or exposure to GLBT individuals in their personal lives and who report inadequate training regarding GLBT issues in their programs will adopt a stray counselor identity. Three cases in our study matched the pattern posed in the second proposition. Therefore, literal replication, which strengthens the internal validity of the finding (Yin, 2009), was accomplished for Proposition 2. The following case descriptions provide evidence to support this claim. The names of participants are pseudonyms used to protect participants’ confidentiality.

**Aubrey.** Aubrey, a 23-year-old White female, identified her best friend as a lesbian. Aubrey explained that her best friend was in a monogamous relationship with another woman to whom she was engaged. However, the lesbian couple was having a difficult time determining how and where they might get married so that their union would be legally

binding. Aubrey reported that her relationship with her best friend has taught her about some of the obstacles faced by gays and lesbians. She stated:

[Having a lesbian friend] gives you a new perspective. I mean, it's one thing to say, well, of course I have no prejudice,...but it's another thing when you see it. And you see their relationship, and they probably have the healthiest relationship out of any couple I know....Just being able to see it through her perspective and hear on a daily basis some of the discrimination she faces, I think would help me be more aware of other people enduring it.

Regarding the GLBT training she has received in her counselor education program, Aubrey explained that "cross cultural [counseling] was the only class that really hit on [GLBT issues]." She remembered that in one class session, they had discussed "some of the oppression that they suffer and some of the prejudice that they get, and how they deal with that," but that she has had "no training in specializing in any of them."

Ultimately, Aubrey believed that she could identify more with the term *stray counselor* than she could *ally*. When reflecting on her identity as a stray counselor, Aubrey explained: "In the sense of being multi-culturally competent, I still think I have a lot to learn, but I think I'm willing to learn it, and I do think I would be able to counsel people with these issues in the future." Regarding an ally identity, she said:

I love the definition of ally, but I can honestly say that I don't voice it in every area of my life, and so although I would be supportive of some of the issues with the GLBT community, I don't voice it constantly. I do to people that are close to me...

**Jessica.** Jessica was a 25-year-old White female who had had various acquaintances with GLBT individuals in her personal life. As she explained, "I used to work at the ballet...[and] we worked with a lot of homosexual people." She also said that one of her best friend's brothers was gay, and that she has been friends with and has worked with others who were gay or lesbian. The GLBT individuals Jessica has known in her personal life have played a key role in her understanding of GLBT issues. She summed up their impact on her learning when she said, "My colleagues and friends have shared their personal experience with me that they have dealt with...so I have learned a lot from that experience, rather than someone teaching me about it."

Jessica remembered that, in her counseling training, they "touched on that a little bit" in her cross-cultural class. She said that they had read about GLBT issues some in their textbook, but that "class leaned its way more toward different ethnicities and races, rather than sexual orientation, so honestly I don't feel like we had that much."

Regarding identity, Jessica said, "I relate more to [stray counselor] rather than necessarily an ally." She then explained:

I feel like I'm willing to learn about my...client's culture and counsel them from a competent point of view....I have a pretty good multicultural base,...and I feel like I could work with them....I don't think that the topic of GLBT has hit me in a personal way for me to stand up as an ally. I think that if I had someone closer to me that was that culture, I would more likely lean towards an ally.

**Jennifer.** Jennifer was a White female aged 43. Jennifer had been a nurse for 18 years prior to entering her counselor education program. She explained that the person who had had the most profound impact on her views of homosexuality had been a patient she had treated who was dying of AIDS. Jennifer said:

It was a tough thing to watch this man suffer through AIDS, and be near death, and watch his married brother chastise him, and then watch the younger brother [who was also gay] flaunt [his homosexuality in front of their straight brother], and then see [the patient] grappling and dealing with death.

Jennifer explained that daily exposure to the patient and his family had served as a catalyst for serious self-reflection regarding her views of homosexuality. Ultimately, she came to the conclusion that “you really have to look at the person, and I think that’s what Christ calls us to do, is to love the person....God doesn’t make junk.”

Jennifer also explained that her hairdresser for the past 20 years, a gay man, has also taught her a great deal about the gay lifestyle. From him, she has learned that GLBT individuals have many of the same experiences as heterosexuals. For example, she said that “he had been in a monogamous relationship for about 30 years, and then recently, the other partner messed around on him. It was very much like a divorce.” Jennifer also learned from her hairdresser that there are aspects of homosexuality that are unique to the GLBT population. Regarding one discussion with him, she said:

He explained to me that being gay, if you do a sex change, it doesn’t make you gay....He described the difference between being gay and needing the sex operation....We have interesting conversations when I go to the hairdresser.

Jennifer reported that there was “not really a whole lot” of training regarding GLBT topics in her counselor education program. She said, “There might have been some discussion in cross cultural and...some discussion in skills.” She explained that, ultimately, “what we are taught is that if we have someone that we feel like we cannot counsel...then we are supposed to refer them out.”

Insofar as stray counselor identity, Jennifer believed that she possessed enough knowledge of GLBT issues to consider herself a stray counselor. To qualify, she stated, “I think I could [counsel GLBT clients], but I think I need more training....The reason I think I could do it is because of my nursing background.” However, Jennifer did not believe that she “would make a very good ally” due to internal conflicts surrounding religious beliefs.

**Rival to Proposition 2.** One case stood out as an anomaly among the others. Although the independent variables of the case matched those of Proposition 2, the outcome was different, which posed an additional rival proposition. The rival proposition was: Participants who report significant relationships with or exposure to GLBT individuals in their personal lives and who report inadequate training regarding GLBT issues in their programs will adopt an ally identity. It was determined that the discrepancy between this case and those that matched proposition 2 could be deemed the product of societal influences. Therefore, the new proposition was labeled a societal rival (Yin, 2009), which contends that, “social trends, not any particular force or intervention, account for the results” (Yin, 2009, p. 135). A description of the case is presented to provide evidence for this finding.

**Janis.** Janis, a 57-year-old White female, has known several gay or lesbian people in her lifetime. She spoke in particular of one lesbian couple that has influenced her understanding of GLBT issues. She explained:

My oldest daughter's husband's sister is a lesbian, and she has a long-term girlfriend. Their relationship is probably more stable than most marriages I know. Certainly vacations and family dinners and those types of things with that side of the family, I have certainly been around it. And they have told me things that they have kind of dealt with.

Janis expressed empathy regarding the struggles the lesbian couple has experienced, and she said that she felt as though her discussions with them have contributed to her knowledge of GLBT issues.

Insofar as her counselor education training, Janis said, "in the multicultural class there is some information and material there, but I have to say, in the rest of the classes, it's not too much. It's not even really mentioned that often." Janis's multicultural class was delivered online, and she recalled that the instructor had assigned the students to read one chapter that discussed GLBT issues in their textbook. Other than the one chapter, there had been very little GLBT training in her program.

When asked about her identity as either a stray counselor or an ally, Janis said, "I think I am definitely an ally." She indicated that she was more than willing to voice her support for GLBT causes, regardless of the venue. In her estimation, her ally stance was attributable to the circumstances of her upbringing. She explained:

I grew up in Chicago, where things are probably a little bit more liberal than they are in Texas. I mean, it's the Bible belt, you know? I'm really just kind of appalled at some of the things they have to deal with in this century, you know? It just seems kind of ridiculous to me.

In addition, Janis stated that she grew up during the Civil Rights Movement, and that the liberal societal ideals that surrounded her in childhood had positively affected her ability to accept people who were different from herself.

**Proposition 3.** One of the cases in our study matched the pattern posed in the third proposition, which stated that participants who report no significant relationships with or exposure to GLBT individuals in their personal lives and who report adequate training regarding GLBT issues in their programs will adopt a stray counselor identity. The following case description provides evidence to support this finding.

**John.** John was a 33-year-old White male. John explained that, although he did have friends who were gay, the friendships were not close. As he stated, "we don't really talk about [their relationships], I guess because...I think they choose to not bring it up." He also reported that in his role as a behavior interventionist for at-risk students in a school district, he has not yet had to counsel any GLBT students. As a result, he has not learned much about GLBT individuals through his friendships or his professional experiences.

John did believe that he had received adequate training regarding GLBT topics in his counselor education program. He explained, "I have a book knowledge of the issues, because I do feel like [my university] provided a certain level of information." John remembered that in his Human Growth and Development class, they talked about different life stages "and things that would come with...sexual orientations." In his multicultural class, they discussed societal attitudes toward GLBT individuals, the coming out process, and risky behaviors associated with homosexual lifestyles. He said that, overall, "I feel like the information I got in the master's program provided me a base level [of knowledge about GLBT individuals]."

Regarding his identity, John stated that he sees himself more as a stray counselor than as an ally. To explain, he said, "I would feel comfortable [counseling GLBT individuals]," and, "I would not be ready to say I would turn away GLBT clients just because I'm straight."

In John's estimation, the counselor-client relationship is still at the core of therapy, and he feels confident in his ability to build relationships with clients with the understanding that "I'm going to have to work. Me and that client are going to have to work together to figure [this out]." John did not believe, however, that he could consider himself an ally, primarily because of his identity as a conservative Christian. Although he would feel competent in counseling GLBT clients, he could not see himself as an active leader for their causes.

**Proposition 4.** One case matched the final proposition, which stated that participants who report no significant relationships with or exposure to GLBT individuals in their personal lives and who also report inadequate training regarding GLBT issues in their programs will adopt neither an ally nor a stray counselor identity. The following case description provides evidence for this finding.

**Veronica.** Veronica, a 25-year-old female, reported that she has had no significant relationships with GLBT individuals in her personal life. In her words, "there have been [GLBT] people that I have known, but I do not know them very well."

Additionally, Veronica could not recall much GLBT training in her counselor education program. She explained that "there is a chapter on it in sexual concerns [class], there is a chapter on it in our multicultural class, but specific stuff, I can't remember." She did note, however, that at her internship site for her field practicum internship class, "the therapists that are training me see gay and lesbian clients, so I have sat in on some couple sessions and some individual sessions." Although Veronica has learned through her internship experience that "there are different issues that arise with gay people," she does not believe that she has been adequately prepared in her program for working with GLBT clients.

Concerning a stray counselor identity, Veronica said, "I don't have the knowledge [to be a stray counselor]." Nor did Veronica believe that she could consider herself an ally, primarily due to her lack of understanding of GLBT issues. As she explained, "I don't think you can advocate for something if you don't know a lot about it."

**Summary of pattern matching.** Comparison of the six cases to the initial propositions yielded support for theoretical replication of the independent variables in the study. All but one of the cases matched one of the rival propositions posed at the outset. Literal replication was accomplished for Proposition 2, with three cases matching the pattern predicted in that proposition. One case posed an additional rival proposition, suggesting that societal influences may play a part in a student's adoption of an ally identity. Furthermore, because none of the cases matched the pattern of independent variables posed in Proposition 1, that proposition could not be evaluated.

## Thematic Analysis

Seven themes, falling into four general categories, emerged from the data. The categories included: (a) themes of personal experience, (b) themes of counselor education training, (c) themes of stray counselor and ally identity, and (d) themes of personal beliefs regarding GLBT individuals. A theme was considered significant if at least four of the six participants provided responses to support it.

**Themes of personal experience.** One primary theme emerged regarding the role of personal experience with and exposure to GLBT individuals. The theme was *personal experience has been more helpful than program training*. Four participants voiced support for this theme. One participant succinctly described it when she said, "I think real experience [with GLBT individuals] prepares you, and I don't think our classes have ever provided that for us."

**Themes of counselor education training.** Three themes emerged regarding GLBT training in counselor education programs. The themes were (a) *inadequate training*, (b)

*programs should provide more experiential learning*, and (c) *programs foster a greater awareness*.

**Theme 1.** The first theme, *inadequate training*, loudly resounded among the participants in this study. Of the six participants, five reported that their counselor education programs had inadequately prepared them for working with GLBT clients. All five who supported this theme noted that GLBT topics had only briefly been mentioned in their cross-cultural/multicultural counseling class, as well as in a handful of other classes. Presentation of material had often been limited to one chapter in a textbook or to classroom discussion during only one class session. Furthermore, one participant provided evidence that suggested a negative approach to classroom discussion of GLBT individuals when she hesitantly reported, “this sounds awful, but I feel like we talked about some of that stuff in abnormal psych. Whether or not it should be there is a different story.” In general, though, classroom learning centered on general topics of homosexuals as a minority group and the societal attitudes GLBT individuals must face.

**Theme 2.** Four participants provided responses to support the theme, *programs should provide more experiential learning*. These participants believed that students would be better served if programs incorporated activities and assignments that would provide them direct experience with and exposure to members of the GLBT population. Two participants even offered suggestions for experiential classroom assignments. As one said, “you have to be exposed to that...I don’t know if [you could] send a group of people out to a gay bar, or to a gay and lesbian walk, or something like that.” Furthermore, two participants noted the value of hearing their classmates’ discussion regarding their work with GLBT clients. One participant stated, “there were a lot of school counselors in that class, so they...shared about some of the people that they had counseled that were having some issues or had been discriminated against because they were bisexual. It was very helpful.”

**Theme 3.** Despite the general consensus that programs provided inadequate training regarding GLBT issues, four participants reported that they had gained a greater awareness of GLBT issues in their program. Thus, *programs foster a greater awareness* was the third theme identified in this category. As one participant explained, “the number one thing I got out of [my program] is [to] be aware that there are differences, and tread lightly, and don’t make assumptions.” Still another said, “my awareness of some of the difficulties that they face maybe has increased a little bit...I have become...more empathetic.”

**Themes of stray counselor and ally identity.** Regarding stray counselor and ally identity, two primary themes emerged. They were (a) *inhibitions about donning an ally identity* and (b) *insecure stray counselor identity*.

**Theme 1.** The first theme, *inhibitions about donning an ally identity*, described the hesitancy that participants had in identifying themselves as allies. Five of the six participants provided responses to support this theme. Three of those five indicated that religious convictions prohibited them from adopting an ally identity. One participant described the internal conflict regarding religious beliefs as a “catch 22.” She stated, “I wouldn’t want to be seen at a gay and lesbian walk, personally, because what does that say about my walk with Christ, versus them?” All five participants indicated, however, that they did not hold any personal judgments of GLBT individuals. For most, it was fear of others’ judgments that prohibited them from donning an ally identity. John, a public school employee, supported this assertion when he said:

I want to be the person where it’s completely safe that students or clients can come. And I will work with them. But when I think of, like, a high school having...a club, or an advocacy group, or something like that...I don’t know that I would want to stand with them and be involved...as an active leader.



**Theme 2. Insecure stray counselor identity** was a theme described by four of the participants. Although all four of those participants identified themselves as stray counselors, they did so with hesitancy. Lack of specific training regarding GLBT issues and clients was the most-frequently cited reason participants felt insecure about calling themselves stray counselors. As one participant articulated, “if they wanted to discuss their sexuality in therapy, and that was their concern,...I think I would be able and definitely willing to do so, but I would need additional training.” Another echoed, “I think I could do it, but I think I need more training.”

**Themes about personal beliefs regarding GLBT individuals.** One primary theme emerged regarding participants’ personal beliefs about GLBT individuals. The theme was, *they’re just people like the rest of us*. All six participants supplied evidence to support this theme. One participant captured the essence of the theme when she said, “what I have noticed in therapy is that they are just people who are just like me...they have the same problems as us.”

**Summary of thematic analysis.** The thematic analysis revealed themes of participants’ experiences that had not been evident from the results of pattern matching. Specifically, our analysis revealed that, despite participants’ messages that program training regarding GLBT issues has been inadequate, they still believed they had gained an awareness of GLBT issues in their programs that they had not possessed prior to their training. In addition, it revealed that students held affirming views of non-heterosexual individuals and largely looked for the similarities, rather than the differences, between themselves and members of the GLBT population.

## Discussion

This study was limited by several factors. First, participants were recruited from only two universities in Texas, and only students in counselor education programs were chosen as cases. Future studies might also include students from both psychology and social work programs. In addition, both quantitative and qualitative analyses that assess the influences of participants’ individual characteristics (e.g., gender, age) on GLBT ally development could serve to enlighten previous research on the topic. An additional limitation to the study was that all participants self-identified as Christian. A Christian identity might narrow an individual’s social circle to primarily other Christians. Research that includes participants of other faiths and participants who are non-religious and non-spiritual could add to the findings of this study.

The overarching question for this study had been: How are straight counselors-in-training prepared for counseling GLBT clients? Of particular interest in this study was what part personal experience with GLBT individuals plays in GLBT-affirmative counselor identity development. Students in this study generally believed that their personal experiences with GLBT individuals had provided them more knowledge about GLBT issues than their counselor education programs. This finding provides support for Ji et al.’s (2009) assertion that heterosexual students believe that direct, personal experiences with members of the GLBT population aid them in gaining necessary skills for working with GLBT clients. Although Graham (2009) asserted that straight students might enter their training programs with little or no exposure to GLBT individuals, five of the six participants in this study reported significant exposure to members of the GLBT population prior to their training.

Also of interest in this study was what part counselor training regarding GLBT issues plays in GLBT-affirmative counselor identity development. All but one of the participants described inadequate training regarding GLBT issues in their counselor education programs, which corroborates the findings of previous studies on this topic (Graham, 2009; Murphy et

al., 2002; Sherry et al., 2005). Since an equal number of participants were recruited from the two university programs represented in this study, discrepancies in participants' recollections of their GLBT training experiences present an enigma that deserves further consideration. For example, the lone male participant in this study was the only participant to report adequate training regarding GLBT topics in his counselor education program. Follow-up interviews were not conducted to address the discrepancies between his recollection of training experiences and those of his female counterparts. However, future studies might explore individual characteristics that contribute to participants' attention to and awareness of training experiences.

Also important to this study was the question: What factors contribute to a stray counselor identity versus an ally identity? The findings of the pattern matching suggest that counselors-in-training who have had either significant relationships with or exposure to GLBT individuals, or adequate training regarding GLBT issues in their programs, might perceive themselves as holding at least a basic knowledge of topics related to GLBT individuals and might feel competent to counsel GLBT clients (i.e., adoption of a stray counselor identity). However, when counselors-in-training lack either significant personal experience with or adequate training regarding GLBT individuals, they might not experience the saliency required to identify themselves as allies. The rival proposition that emerged in data analysis indicated that inadequate training in counselor education programs might not prohibit counselors-in-training from adopting an ally identity, especially if they have had significant relationships with members of the GLBT population. Instead, societal factors, along with personal experience with GLBT individuals, may influence a counselor's stance as an ally. In the absence of both exposure to GLBT individuals and adequate training in counselor education programs, straight students might exit their programs feeling inadequately prepared to counsel GLBT clients (i.e., unable to adopt a stray counselor identity) and might be unlikely to identify themselves as allies.

The findings of the pattern matching revealed that, across the cases, students who reported having adequate knowledge of GLBT individuals (acquired via personal experience with members of the GLBT population or via adequate program training regarding GLBT issues) identified themselves as either stray counselors or as allies. Therefore, the findings of the pattern matching offered support for multicultural counseling theory, which posits that knowledge of a minority group is a necessary component for majority group members to interact effectively with members of the minority group (Arrendondo, 1999). However, students' *actual* counseling effectiveness with GLBT individuals was not examined in this study. Therefore, future studies that examine students' actual effectiveness with, versus their perceived self-efficacy for working with, GLBT individuals could add to the findings of this study.

Regarding social identity theory, theoretical replication of the proposed propositions provided evidence to support the construct of an identity hierarchy. The theoretical replication also provided validation for a GLBT-affirmative identity that represents a developmental point between a non-GLBT-affirmative identity and a GLBT ally identity (i.e., a stray counselor identity).

It is important to note that the findings of this study can only be used to describe the study participants and that these findings may not be transferable to other students in the two universities studied or at other universities. However, the authors of this study believe that the rigor of analyses, as well as the credibility of the researchers, lends intellectual integrity to the findings (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the authors assert confidence in the transferability of findings to cases whose contexts are sufficiently congruent with the contexts of the cases in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).

The findings of this study provide support for the implementation of a GLBT-affirmative course that incorporates experiential assignments, such as the one developed by Ji et al. (2009), into counselor education programs. The results of this study corroborate Ji et al.'s finding that heterosexual students believe that direct exposure to GLBT individuals plays an important role in their learning about GLBT issues. Because students place a high value on experiential learning, and because heterosexual students may or may not enter their counselor education programs with prior exposure to GLBT individuals, the infusion of assignments that offer students direct exposure to members of the GLBT population into course curricula may greatly aid students in their development of a GLBT-affirmative counselor identity.

As noted by Ji et al. (2009), and congruent with the findings of this study, some students might experience some internal conflict regarding their religious beliefs and the adoption of a GLBT ally identity. As a result, assignments that involve total submersion into the GLBT population could potentially cause distress for conflicted students. Therefore, the following activities are provided as a starting point for counselor educators who wish to gently expose students to the GLBT community or to encourage thought about challenges that GLBT individuals face.

- Students attend a PFLAG (i.e., Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) meeting and write a reflection of their experience.
- Students complete a scavenger hunt to locate community resources that provide services to GLBT individuals (e.g., a church, a mental healthcare provider, a support group) and collect business cards and literature from each location. For an online class, students might collect the literature and then scan images of it to be electronically posted on the class site.
- Counselor educators invite GLBT individuals to class to speak to students about their experiences in counseling. For an online class, the speaker and students might use webcams to conduct the session.
- Students interview GLBT individuals and leaders of GLBT organizations to learn of the needs of the GLBT community.
- Students write a paper in which they describe what it would be like to live as a straight person in a world where same-sex relationships are the norm and societal messages discourage and condemn heterosexual relationships.

In addition to the aforementioned activities, counselor educators might also capitalize on classroom discussions that allow students to share with each other their personal experiences regarding interactions with members of the GLBT population. For an online class, the discussion board might be an appropriate medium for these discussions.

Regarding GLBT ally identity development, the notion of a stray counselor identity, proposed to lie on an identity hierarchy between a non-GLBT-affirmative identity and a GLBT ally identity, serves to remind counselor educators that students' development toward becoming allies likely occurs incrementally. Thinking in terms of black or white, that heterosexual students either are or are not GLBT allies, undermines the tenets of social identity theory and may potentially impose boundaries on students' development, which is partly influenced by teacher attitudes (Guo & Zhou, 2008). To be a stray counselor is not to be an ally, yet it is a hierarchical step in the right direction.

The theoretical replication accomplished in this study serves only to provide a foundation for further inquiry into this topic. Replication of the results in future studies could augment and provide support for the findings. Future research might also address the rival proposition that emerged in data analysis. Examination of the societal rival could possibly be accomplished by conducting research that includes participants from various geographic

locations of the United States (e.g., northeast, far west, midwest), as well as from a variety of institutions (e.g., private universities, urban universities, and state colleges).

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### Author Note

Shannon L. Lynch is a doctoral student in the Department of Counselor Education at Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX. Her research interests are GLBT ally development in counselor training, the intersection of GLBT and spirituality issues in counseling, and supervision of counselor trainees in practica courses.

Rick Bruhn, Ed.D. is a Professor of Counselor Education at Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX. His research interests are MFT licensing board standards, empathy in counselor training, and play therapy training.

Dr. Richard C. Henriksen Jr. is an Associate Professor of Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling at Sam Houston State University. He has given more than 35 presentations on multicultural issues at the national, state, and local levels, including 18 presentations involving the multiple heritage population, and has published articles in professional journals on this topic. Dr. Henriksen has more than 15 years experience providing counseling services and have been involved with diversity issues and counseling.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Shannon L. Lynch, Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling, Sam Houston State University, Box 2119, Huntsville, TX, 77341-2119. Email: [slw024@shsu.edu](mailto:slw024@shsu.edu)

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