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# The Use of Sexual Minority Youth Advocacy Organizations by Inner-City Schools

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctor of Education Program

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The Use of Sexual Minority Youth Advocacy Organizations by Inner City Schools

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Concordia University–Portland  
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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in  
Transformational Leadership

Floralba A, Marrero, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee  
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Concordia University–Portland

2018

## **Abstract**

Sexual minority youth continue to report higher instances of negative experiences in schools compared to non-sexual minority peers. The purpose of this study was to understand whether sexual minority youth advocacy organizations engage with inner city schools and whether this leads to the awareness about sexual minority youth and enhanced advocacy for this population through the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth. The theory of heteronormativity shapes the school environment and suggests that heterosexuality is normal and opposition to this is not normal or natural causing the marginalization of sexual minority youth. The research questions examined interactions between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel and whether diversity training led to policy development specific to sexual minority youth at the school. A survey was sent out to employees and volunteers at minority youth advocacy organizations at various inner city locations. Pearson's chi-square analysis was used to determine if there was any relationship between the categorical variables. Findings from this study indicate a positive relationship between the frequency of contact with school leadership by sexual minority youth organizations and the request for diversity training by the school. There was also a positive relationship between the request for diversity training and the development of policy to support sexual minority youth in schools.

*Keywords:* diversity training, policy development, sexual minority advocacy organizations, sexual minority youth, inner city schools

## **Dedication**

This study would not have been possible without the constant support from several people in my life. First, I dedicate this study to my parents who not only made me who I am today but who tirelessly assumed other roles throughout this process to ensure I had the time to achieve this goal. Second, I dedicate this study to my husband, even though we met in the middle of my doctoral journey, for never doubting me, always listening to my fears, and managing to make me feel positive even during the most trying times.

A special dedication goes to my daughter who endured my many working hours and who always knew what it meant when “mommy had to write.”

Thank you to my two bonus children that quickly learned and respected the amount of time and effort I had to put into this process.

Lastly, I dedicate this study to an undergraduate professor, Dr. Fisher, who told me I was too smart to stop going to school and that I could make a difference in the world, which was a comment that changed my path forever.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction to the Problem**

Many educational initiatives include the advancement of school environments, curriculum, and instruction for sexual minority youth. Despite such initiatives, the annual nationwide survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that sexual minority youth have negative experiences in schools that affect social and emotional development (GLSEN, 2016). While the awareness of sexual minority issues is advancing, educators are still uncomfortable in addressing issues related to sexual minority youth and are unable to incorporate curriculum and instruction that is inclusive of this population (Fields, Mamo, Gilbert, & Lesko, 2014; Walker & Bates, 2016).

As the problem of unsupportive school environments for sexual minority youth continues, the negative effects also continue to wreak havoc on sexual minority youth in schools. Some of these negative effects include suicide and attempted suicide for this population, skipping school, and behaviors that lead to lower grade point averages (GPAs) (GLSEN, 2016). Students that identify or are perceived as sexual minorities report being three times more likely to contemplate suicide and almost five times more likely to attempt suicide compared to heterosexual peers (The Trevor Project, 2018). Schools have the unique opportunity to enhance the outcomes for this population through support from external organizations such as these, but there is nothing that mandates schools utilize this resource.

With the continued harassment of sexual minority youth and the failure of schools to address such issues, organizations are established throughout the United States that are specifically devoted to enhancing educational settings for sexual minority youth. While much research has focused on sexual minority youth students in the context of the school environment,

there has been a lack of studies that incorporate external organizations that offer support to schools. Further, there has been a lack of past research devoted to the inclusion of diverse populations such as those found in inner city schools. By examining the relationship between sexual minority advocacy organizations and inner city schools' researchers can begin to understand how inner city schools are utilizing organizations and the impact of this association on the development of policy that supports sexual minority youth in schools.

This study examined the frequency of communication between inner city school personnel and sexual minority youth advocacy organizations. These personnel include principals, vice or assistant principals or deans, social worker, or psychologist, or counselor, school nurse, or medical professional, and school resource or security officer. By examining communication, I was able to determine if school leadership or other school personnel are associated with the implementation of diversity training at the school.

Understanding if diversity training leads to policy development that is specific to sexual minority youth can assist sexual minority advocacy organizations knowledge on how diversity training generates advocacy. Schools often have policy that is specific to bullying and harassment but lack policy that is specific to sexual minority students, which hinders faculty and staff from appropriately handling situations involving this population (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013).

## **Background**

School systems are a direct representation of the established norms that marginalize sexual minority youth, presenting social and emotional difficulties for this population (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espilage, 2012). This leads to sexual minority youth feeling unwelcomed and unable to fully express themselves in the school environment (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson &

Espilage, 2012). Heteronormativity is a social norm that embodies the perception that an individual has of sexuality, and the perceived traditional societal roles of males and females (Freedman, Shultz, & Hoffman, 2013; GLSEN, 2018; McNeill, 2013; Robinson & Espilage, 2012). Research shows that heteronormativity shapes the school culture and environment through biases and policy, creating disparities between sexual minorities and gender normed youth (Freedman et al. 2013; GLSEN, 2016; McNeill, 2013; Newman & Fantus, 2015). While some schools attempt to shift to an all-inclusive learning environment that is representative of all students' experiences, including sexual minorities, many attempts fall short of creating a safe and supportive school environment for sexual minority youth (Ciszek, 2014; Fairtlough, Bernard, Fletcher, & Akile, 2013; GLSEN, 2016).

Negative consequences due to unsupportive school environments include the health and safety of this population. The increase of self-harm among sexual minority youth has been highly publicized and has shown school environments do affect negative outcomes (Ciszek, 2014; GLSEN, 2016). Although there has been a slight decline in the bullying and harassment cases reported by sexual minority youth, the data continues to show the need for much improvement in school settings by educating faculty and developing policy that supports sexual minority youth in schools (GLSEN, 2016; O'Malley & Capper, 2015; Payne & Smith, 2013). Having effective training to develop policies and practices that encourage leadership within the school to challenge norms, take hold of teachable moments, and empower all youth, while feeling personally supported by the climate and culture, is a challenge that continues to marginalize the sexual minority youth population and must be addressed (GLSEN, 2016; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013).

School leadership can incorporate policies and practices that directly influence the school culture and climate (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). In most cases, policies and practices reside on dominant norms like heteronormativity, which transcend to the school environment (Hislop, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2013; Singleton & Linton, 2006). School policies and practices continue to restrict sexual minority youth from such things as an inclusive curriculum, sports, extra-curricular activities, and supporting gay-straight alliances (GSAs) (GLSEN, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2013). For example, sexual minority youth students have reported less participation in extra-curricular sports compared to heteronormative peers and being discriminated against regularly when on a sports team (GLSEN, 2013).

Payne & Smith (2013) explained that school policies and practices are grounded in the gender heteronormative organizational structure that assumes equality, which is not congruent with case studies of sexual minority students. It is further argued that the focus for policies and practices should be on the culture and climate of a school instead of defining bullying and harassment in terms of individuals or groups (Payne & Smith, 2013). School policies and practices have generally lacked in establishing a firm culture of acceptance for all individuals' due to the absence of clarity by not enumerating action steps to prevent and effectively resolve negative incidents in school that involve sexual minority youth (Ciszek, 2014; GLSEN, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2013).

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study examined the role of inner city schools utilizing organizations that are dedicated in supporting sexual minority youth in feeling safe and supported in the school environment through policies and best practices. The primary concern is the equal treatment of sexual minority youth to ensure schools are safe. Understanding if the development of policies

occurs after diversity training is implemented by external organizations is beneficial to the organizations and to inner city schools.

Researchers have focused largely on the experiences of sexual minority youth concluding that there are often negative outcomes for this population in the school context (GLSEN, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Espilage, 2012). Although it is critical to understand the perspective of the sexual minority youth population, researchers must continue to develop methods to understand how to challenge cultural norms and create safe and supportive school environments for this population. This process involves the understanding of how inner city schools seek support from sexual minority advocacy organizations that are well established and dedicated to improving school environments for sexual minority youth. Past research has not examined the relationship between inner city schools and sexual minority advocacy organizations on policy development to protect sexual minority youth in schools.

This study specifically looked at inner city schools. Researchers have conducted studies largely in suburban areas where lack of diversity is often cited as a limitation. Studies on non-diverse populations limit understanding of multiple perspectives, which is imperative in developing sound solutions (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Additionally, how schools use such organizations for training and policy development for sexual minority youth is critical to examine. Challenges to develop and implement policy can depend on resources such as funding and community members (Bishop & Atlas, 2015; Mallinson, 2016).

Newman and Fantus (2015) argued communities with less adult educational attainment and lower incomes have more hostile school environments for sexual minority youth. Urban areas often encompass many of the lower income communities that struggle to implement policy

and practices that encourage equitable outcomes leading to institutional barriers that can impact the success of this population (Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand whether sexual minority youth advocacy organizations engage with inner city schools and whether this leads to the awareness about sexual minority youth and enhanced advocacy for this population through the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth. Diversity training programs offered by sexual minority advocacy organizations offer support by conducting staff professional development to raise awareness about sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2018; Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2018). Development of policy can be accomplished using multiple stakeholders, often including sexual minority advocacy organizations (Mallinson, 2016; Robertson & Hill, 2014).

In this study, a criterion sampling of individuals who were employed or volunteered for sexual minority youth advocacy organizations that offer diversity training to inner city schools were surveyed to determine the frequency of communication with school leadership and personnel to determine whether there was an association with the implementation of diversity training. I also examined whether there was an association between diversity training requested by inner city schools and the interest in development of policy specific to sexual minority youth. This determined if diversity training effects awareness by inner city schools to develop policy for sexual minority youth, thereby improving the school environment for this population.

### **Research Questions**

Overarching Question: How does school engagement of sexual minority youth advocacy organizations lead to school advocacy for this population?

The following questions were developed for this study:

Research question 1: What is the frequency of interactions between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel and the personnel utilizing the diversity training offered by the organization? The variables include (a) interactions with inner city school personnel, and (b) request for diversity training.

Sub question 1: Which personnel at inner city schools do organizations have the most frequent contact with? School personnel is enumerated and includes the principal, vice/assistant principal, dean, school social worker, psychologist, counselor, school nurse, medical professional, school resource or security officer.

Research question 2: What is the relationship between diversity training and the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth at the school? The variables include (a) diversity training requested, and (b) policy development.

H1<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between interactions by organizations with inner city school personnel and diversity training requested by inner city schools.

H2<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between diversity training requested in inner city schools and the development of policy.

### **Significance of the Study**

Past studies have often cited limitations in research, including diverse inner city populations, and the focus has been largely on sexual minority youth experiences (Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). The potential benefits of this study include raising awareness of whether inner city schools are seeking support for sexual minority youth, if schools make use of organizations to develop policy that specifically supports sexual minority youth and bringing general awareness of this population and the advancements and improvements that are needed to ensure safe and supportive school environments for them.

I determined the relationship between frequency of contact between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and inner city schools and whether policy to support and protect sexual minority youth is developed after diversity training takes place. By examining these components, researchers can advance to better understand how inner city schools are working to enhance the environment for sexual minority youth.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Diversity training:* Diversity training is training dedicated to the awareness and advancement of sexual minorities (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

*Policy development:* Policy development is the progress of educational policy that regulates school structure and function (Cambron-McCabe, & McCarthy, 2005).

*Sexual minority advocacy organizations:* Sexual minority advocacy organizations are organizations that serve sexual minorities and work to improve such things as school environments (Diversity Best Practices, 2018).

*Sexual minority youth:* Sexual minority youth are individuals that do not identify as completely heterosexual. This is an umbrella term that can include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning or queer individuals (GLSEN, 2018).

*School leadership:* School leadership includes principals, vice or assistant principals, or deans (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013).

*School personnel:* School personnel are faculty and staff in a school building including principals, vice or assistant principals or deans, social worker or psychologist or counselor, nurse or medical professional, and resource or safety officer (ThoughtCo., n.d.).

*Teacher:* A teacher is an individual that provides instruction to students in a specialized area of content (ThoughtCo., n.d.).

## **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

The expectation for this study was that organizations that are focused on sexual minority youth advocacy frequently offer diversity training to inner city schools. This study assumed that diversity training helps schools understand the effect of a negative school environment on sexual minority youth students. All students deserve to be in a safe and supportive school environment. School faculty and staff should be obligated to ensure student safety, this includes measures to ensure harassment does not occur and if school personnel take actionable steps to stop the harassment.

Schools often provide staff training and development, which can include diversity training. Determining the frequency of communication between sexual minority advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel and if there is an association to diversity training and the effect on policy development is critical in understanding advancements schools are attempting to make to ensure a safe and supportive environment for sexual minority youth.

Using data from sexual minority advocacy organization employees and volunteers that serve inner city school areas across the country is a delimitation deliberately used to develop a better understanding of the relationship between sexual minority advocacy organizations and inner city schools on sexual minority youth awareness and policy development. Past research has lacked diverse populations of study and has been conducted largely in suburban areas (Marshall & Yarber, 2015; Robinson & Espelage, 2012).

For this research, there was a deliberate use of well-established organizations to ensure congruency across the study. It allowed me to generalize the findings to similar organizations in structure and function. The only organizations used for the research included GLSEN and HRC, both of which are widely known and respected for the work each do on behalf of sexual minority

youth. Additionally, the survey used to collect data was specific to frequency of interactions among the specified organizations with inner city school personnel to begin understanding how sexual minority advocacy organizations are utilized and the association of the diversity trainings offered by sexual minority advocacy organizations on policy development specific to sexual minority youth. Using the delimitations described here enhanced the process and validity of the study and allowed for future research to expand on the findings (Johnson & Christensen, 2007; Karras, 1997).

Limitations to the study included only using the organizations GLSEN and HRC members as participants. There are other organizations devoted to the advancement of sexual minorities that offer support to inner city schools; however, GLSEN and HRC are established and widely recognized in most cities nationwide. Both organizations offer diversity training and support to schools.

Researchers in the past have traditionally focused on the school experience from the perspective of sexual minority youth, which helped establish understanding of the disparities in schools (GLSEN, 2016). While this has been an important baseline to the research about sexual minority youth, there must be an effort to understand the impact of sexual minority advocacy organizations on diversity training and policy development in schools.

## **Summary**

I sought to determine how sexual minority advocacy organizations are utilized by inner city schools specifically for diversity training and if it results in the development of policy. Working with sexual minority advocacy organizations in urban areas is an area that needs further examination; however, it is critical to be able to generalize findings and gain multiple perspectives. Research in this study took place in multiple inner city locations throughout the

United States; data was collected using a survey link sent via email to make the process of data collection easy and convenient.

The following chapters of this study include a review of the literature, the conceptual framework, methodology, findings, and analysis. The conceptual framework establishes the theories behind sexual minority experiences in educational settings. Using the conceptual framework was imperative to developing the methodology, which explains the methods used in this study based on valid past research. The data analysis and findings are determined and presented in light of past research and practice.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Sexual minority youth continue to experience disparities in educational settings, this influences their academic outcomes (GLSEN, 2016). Inequities involving this specific population are increasingly a critical issue in schools and federal systems, which should support innovation in policy adoption to better serve students despite their sexual orientation (Mallinson, 2016). Although research shows there have been improvements regarding comfort and access in educational systems for sexual minority students, there are still discrepancies that have a negative impact on this population that can lead to drastic consequences such as suicide (GLSEN, 2016; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013).

According to The Trevor Project (2018) sexual minority students are three times more likely to contemplate suicide and almost five times more likely to attempt suicide compared to their heterosexual peers. Further, suicide attempts by sexual minority youth are five times more likely to result in the need for medical treatment and four to six times more likely to result in injury compared to heteronormative peers. Leadership plays a critical role in establishing a school environment that respects and defends a student's right to sexual diversity, but this type of environment is often not attainable due to lack of knowledge, commitment, and resources (Mallinson, 2016; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Literature has focused strongly on the occurrences of harassment and bullying that occur in schools against sexual minority students but must begin to consider the influence of policy development and implementation around this issue to support sexual minority youth.

Using peer-reviewed publications found through the Concordia University online library information was gathered pertaining to sexual minority youth and education. An extensive

number of articles were recovered and reviewed to determine the primary components of the literature review. Databases searched included EBSCOHOST, GoogleScholar, ERIC, and ProQuest. Literature search terms were used in multiple combinations and included sexual minority youth, LGBTQ, bullying and harassment, policies, practices, education, students, leadership, adolescents, training, distress, suicide, GSA, programs. One example of the extensiveness of the search was using the database ProQuest, when using the search terms sexual minority youth, education, and students. Then the same database was searched using the terms LGBTQ youth, education, and students. Each search yielded slightly over 1,000 results to examine. Reviewing articles from the past seven years narrowed this number.

The database JSTOR was searched using the terms LGBTQ, education, and policy, which produced over 5,000 results; these were narrowed using current articles from the past seven years. Each article was skimmed over and then when determined useful were incorporated into a literature review matrix that embodied multiple aspects such as data analysis, analyzing the source, and alignment to the research. Over 60 articles were included in the matrix for this study.

### **Study Topic**

The research topic addresses the role of community advocacy groups in training schools to support sexual minority youth in a school environment context. The advocacy groups do this by training personnel to develop policies based upon best practices. Current school climate and culture were examined to determine school climate on the topic of sexual minority youth and attempts to foment and develop a supportive system. The primary concern and a continuous problem are the acceptance of sexual minority youth in schools by peers and school staff (GLSEN, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2013).

The health and safety of the sexual minority youth population continues to be a problem. Although there has been a slight decline in the bullying and harassment cases reported by sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2016), the data continues to show the need for improvement of the school environment. More than half of sexual minority students who have reported being harassed or assaulted did not report the incident due to lack of effective methods to prevent the incident from reoccurring or fear of retaliation (GLSEN, 2016).

The increase of self-harm among sexual minority youth has been highly publicized and has shown unsupportive school environments do influence the outcomes of sexual minority youth (Ciszek, 2014; GLSEN, 2016). Each victimization of a sexual minority youth student that goes unchecked increases the chance of self-harm by 2.5 times on average, which can lead to death (The Trevor Project, 2018). The death of sexual minority students is tragic and has a lasting effect on families and peers, showing the importance of ensuring safe and supportive school environments.

Policies and practices set forth by school leadership directly develop and empower school culture and climate, which in most cases resides on dominant norms within society that transcend to the school environment (Hislop, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2013; Singleton & Linton, 2006). School policies and practices continue to restrict sexual minority youth from such things as an inclusive curriculum, sports, extra-curricular activities, and supporting GSAs (GLSEN, 2016). Inclusive curriculums allow for the incorporation of multiple perspectives and experiences from various cultures into teaching syllabi and planning (Sen, Umemoto, Koh, & Zambonelli, 2016).

Payne and Smith (2013) explained that school policies and practices are grounded in the gender heteronormative structures that assume equality and do not incorporate minority perspectives. This lack of inclusive policy structure at schools creates an environment that is not

supportive of sexual minority youth causing discomfort and discrimination for this population of students. It is further argued that policies and practices should focus upon school culture and climate instead of simply defining bullying and harassment in terms of individuals or groups, as many schools do. It is useful to include definitions as part of a policy, but it is important to develop actionable steps and explanations to provide clarity of how to effectively prevent, stop, and report incidents. Having effective diversity training to develop policies and practices that encourage leadership within the school to challenge norms, embrace teachable moments, and empower all youth, will help sexual minority youth feel personally supported by the climate and culture. According to GLSEN (2016) and Slesaransky-Poe (2013), this development is a challenge that continues to marginalize the sexual minority youth population and must be addressed.

### **Context**

Policies and practices have not established a firm culture of acceptance for all individuals' due to lack of diversity training for school faculty and staff. Clarity of policies and procedures by specifically enumerating actionable steps to prevent and solve negative incidents in schools regarding sexual minority youth is essential (Ciszek, 2014; GLSEN, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2013). Mallinson (2016) explained that policy adoption depends largely on resources and a supportive environment that can be improved through diversity training.

Although many states have leaned toward a comprehensive policy practice, it is also difficult to establish policy that enumerates actionable steps. Many policies attempt to argue why policy is important instead of implementing techniques (Lythgoe, 2013). Lack of clear policy facilitates the development of an environment within schools that allows for the harassment of individuals that do not conform to heterosexual norms causing severe and

detrimental consequences (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). Leadership and poor dynamics between school staff have also contributed to the current state of marginalizing sexual minority youth. Elias (2017) posited that improving dynamics within a system requires that the leaders of the organization be the first to focus on comprehension and awareness.

School environments are generally aligned to conform to cultural norms that demean minority populations through stereotypes and biases that must be challenged by raising awareness (Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Biases and stereotypes are prevalent in any climate and culture, which contribute to the marginalization of specific populations (Newman & Fantus, 2015; Singleton & Linton, 2006). School personnel struggle to embrace sexual diversity, which limits the ability of student awareness and acceptance of differences regarding the topic of sexual minority youth (Ciszek, 2014; GLSEN, 2016). Biases and stereotypes that fall under culturally normed criteria go unchecked allowing for marginalized personal beliefs and values to be placed on others unjustly (Newman & Fantus, 2015). School leadership must work to improve the environment by understanding and challenging the impact of marginalizing populations or systems will continue to fail to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students.

### **Significance**

All students deserve to attend school in a safe and supportive environment that contributes their healthy and successful development. Reports of self-harm including suicide of sexual minority youth due to harassment and non-acceptance, partially contributed by the school environment, suggests an urgent need to develop more support and inclusion in school systems (GLSEN, 2016).

After a personal experience with a student tragedy directly related to bullying and harassment due to sexual orientation within the school system, I am convinced that research must aim to address the challenges that work toward improving school environments for all students. Efforts must be made to specifically improve school settings for sexual minority youth to eliminate marginalized practices that lead to detrimental and sometimes tragic consequences.

### **Problem Statement**

Sexual minority youth continue to have negative experiences in schools, which affect their own social and emotional wellbeing (GLSEN, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2013). Over the past several years, sexual minority youth experiences in schools have been widely studied. Findings indicate this population has lower GPAs, are more likely to skip school due to discomfort, and have increased thoughts of suicide compared to heteronormative peers (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012).

Leadership within inner city schools must better support sexual minority school adolescents by raising awareness about this topic to faculty and staff and implementing policies and best-practices that support sexual minority students. An improved supportive environment for this population cannot develop without appropriate diversity training and policy implementation that addresses common cultural norms emphasizing enumeration of actionable steps. Training on such a sensitive topic can include the utilization of outside community organizations and advocates that have specific knowledge and understanding on sexual minority youth and how to best serve and protect this population in a school context (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018).

This study focused on the advocate perspective of two nationwide organizations that specialize in improving the school environment for sexual minority youth. The frequency of

communication with inner city school personnel and the request for diversity training in inner city schools and how this can facilitate an interest in policies and best practices to support sexual minority students was examined. The variables in this study included sexual minority youth advocacy organizations, diversity training, and policy development to support and protect this population. This research was specific to sexual minority advocacy organizations in the context of inner city schools, which are both areas to be explored based upon past research. Awareness is a positive advancement in policy based on equity and will serve to shift the thinking of inner city schools to contemplate about how to ensure all students are successful given needed support and resources (Newman & Fantus, 2015; Singleton & Linton, 2006).

### **Organization**

This literature review explores the current research literature to determine how sexual minority youth advocacy organizations work with inner city schools to develop positive environments for sexual minority youth and the pitfalls of such attempts. Elements include sexual minority youth and organizations that seek to advance this population, schools, leadership within schools, and policy development. A developed conceptual framework discusses researcher understanding of current phenomena to justify a specific position (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The review of research literature, methodological literature, and review of methodological issues establishes reasoning for gathering data and relating choices to the community and practice, as well as, addresses strengths and weaknesses of approaches in past research (Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

Moving toward advocacy, a synthesis of research findings serves to develop trends and commonalities to show the reality of information under review. A critique of previous research presents an evaluation of claims and findings to appropriately apply the information to the

current study (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). It is important to recognize that the leadership of a school is the primary source that determines the professional development and policy agenda that are implemented at a school. Leadership dramatically shapes the culture of the school by determining topics to address and bring to discuss among faculty and staff (Taysum, 2016).

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework used in this study is shown in Figure 1. The researcher used published sources that are throughout this document (Freedman, Shultz, & Hoffman, 2013; GLSEN, 2016; Hislop, 2013, Mallinson, 2016; McNeill, 2013; Newman & Fantus, 2015; Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Singleton & Linton, 2006) to develop the figure that shows how cultural norms and heteronormativity, equity, leadership and training, and policy and practices are related.

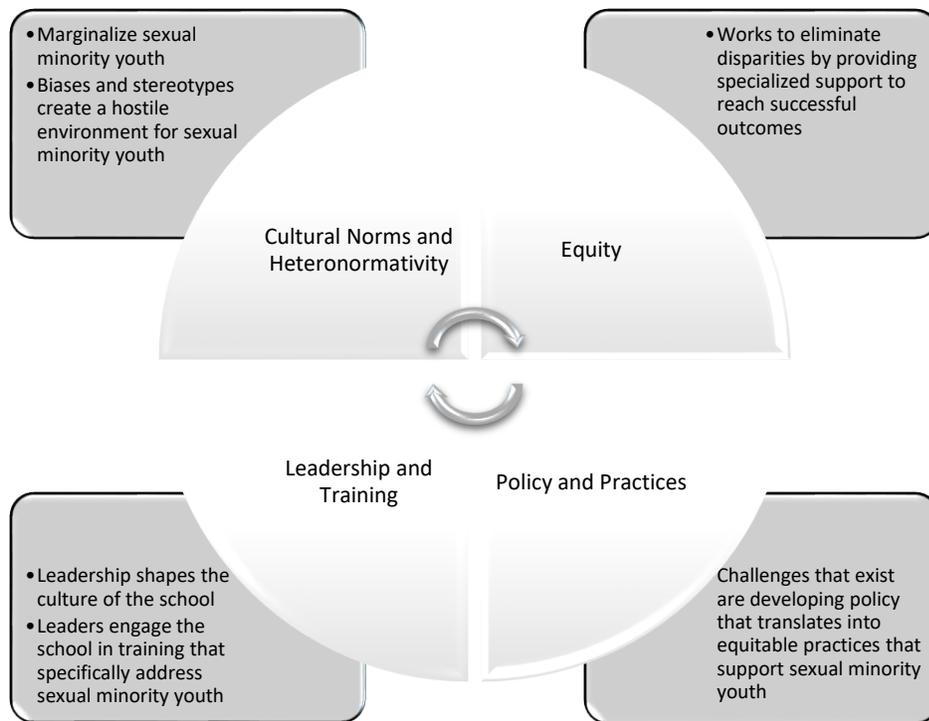


Figure 1. Graphic of the theoretical framework for this study.

**Cultural norms.** Cultural norms are an established set of normalized attitudes and behaviors. Challenging the system of cultural norms and biases to develop equitable outcomes is an intense process requiring knowledgeable leadership informed policy and practice and critical reflection (Singleton & Linton, 2006). School systems are a direct representation of the established norms that marginalize sexual minority youth presenting difficulties for this population both socially and emotionally (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Epilage, 2012).

Heteronormativity is a social norm that embraces the perception that an individual has of sexuality and the perceived roles of males and females (McNeill, 2013). Research shows that heteronormativity shapes the school culture and environment through biases and policy creating disparities for sexual minorities compared to gender normed youth (Freedman, Shultz, & Hoffman, 2013; GLSEN, 2016; McNeill, 2013; Newman & Fantus, 2015). While schools are attempting to shift to an all-inclusive learning environment that is representative of all students' experiences, there are struggles of such actions leading to comparable results of negative consequences for sexual minority youth such as lower GPAs, discrimination, and suicide (Ciszek, 2014; Fairtlough et al., 2013).

**Theory of heteronormativity.** Newman and Fantus (2015) explained that the link between heteronormativity and cultural norms creates an environment that can be hostile by allowing for victimization of sexual minority youth. Ideologies are embedded in thoughts and perceptions that are largely homophobic and are grounded in avoiding topics related to homosexuality. Students are perceived as heterosexual and opposition to falling into the male and female role designated by gender identity and gender expression leads to discomfort and unwelcoming school environments (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013).

Due to such a hostile environment, sexual minority youth cannot fully explore and express identity (Dinkins & Englert, 2015). This partially contributes to such outcomes as increased rates of suicide attempts and lack of well-being of sexual minority youth (Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Heteronormativity contributes to the school environment and can be contested by policies that seek to bring awareness to sexual minority issues and by changing cultural standards (Payne & Smith, 2013).

Freedman et al. (2013) discussed the importance of understanding heteronormativity within schools to challenge gender norms. More research in this area to expand knowledge and raise awareness to build educational policy and strategies that challenge heteronormativity is needed to combat the large component that shapes the educational environment (AERA, 2010).

**Equity.** Equality is the same treatment for all, whereas equity is not about equal treatment of everyone but focuses on individual needs (Hislop, 2013; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Equity is about having the same outcome for all learners: for example, successful schooling and globally competitive graduates. Individualized support can be necessary for students to reach the outcomes in addition to specific policies and practices that decrease the marginalization of populations such as sexual minority youth (Linton, 2011).

Sexual minority youth, which are a small population compared to the general population, have reported higher incidents of bullying and harassment than heteronormative peers resulting in discomfort and even increased rates of suicide. With higher rates of suicide and increased suicidal behavior, sexual minority youth are an at-risk population that needs support and safer school environments (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Sexual minority youth research demonstrates that many schools do not have systems in place that support this population, leaving students to adapt to the culture and climate of the school, which is

heteronormative and allows for bullying and harassment to go uncontested. It is recommended that schools seek to make improvements and adjustments, such as implementing inclusive policy and practices that support and protect sexual minority youth, but this will take significant efforts to overcome heteronormativity and cultural norms (Fletcher, Bernard, Fairtlough, & Ahmet, 2015).

There is concern among schools about bringing in diverse approaches to teaching and learning as indicated by the lack of a supportive environment for sexual minority youth (Fletcher et al., 2015; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Equity practices challenge norms grounded in heteronormativity and cultural norms to elicit positive changes, which requires awareness surrounding the issue that inhibits the growth and development of specific populations such as sexual minority youth (Fletcher et al., 2015; Linton, 2011; Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Research by Walker and Bates (2016) showed limited equity in access to resources that are related to sexual minority youth such as library books, curriculum, and policy specific to sexual minority youth students. Equity requires leadership awareness to address the issues sexual minority youth face in schools. Leadership must also bring unbiased actions to schools to decrease disparities by making inclusive environments for sexual minority youth a priority. Galloway and Ishimaru (2015) explained that there is the opportunity to address disparities for sexual minority youth through equitable policy and practices to help change outcomes but there must be an awareness and a desire to challenge oppressive systems.

**Policy development.** There are barriers to develop and implement policy such as resources and community members. Research shows that states that have more anti-bullying policies also have comprehensive supplies and funding (Mallinson, 2016). A study used secondary quantitative data conducted by Mallinson reported financial resources and support of

the community can influence the development of policy indicated by the least squares model to analyze statistical data from states nationwide.

Bishop and Atlas (2015) explained that funding attributes to access to such resources as extra curriculum materials, training and development, and informational materials. This supports research by Newman and Fantus (2015) that argued communities with less adult education attainment and lower incomes have more hostile school environments for sexual minority youth. Urban areas often encompass many of the lower income communities that struggle to implement policy and practices that encourage equitable outcomes leading to institutional barriers that can impact the safety and success of this population (Snapp et al., 2015). Fortunately, in past years, policies and procedures regarding sexual minority youth have become increasingly important to some school improvement efforts, but more efforts are still needed to become truly equitable (GLSEN, 2016).

Taylor, Lewis, Jacobmier, and Disarro (2012) discussed a strong need for learning and knowledge about sexual minority policy. The authors argued that multiple perspectives are necessary pertaining to sexual minority youth when developing policy to embrace and protect all individuals to bring awareness to the challenges the population endures. The process of policy development brings personal subjectivity and bias, most often grounded in heteronormativity, so it is vital to have multiple perspectives that challenge ideology and produce comprehensive policy that is equitable (Robertson & Hill, 2014). Although the necessity of multiple perspectives is far from authentic implementation, the mere aspect of attempting to adopt policy and begin conversations related to the topic of sexual minority youth raises awareness about this critical issue (Barrett & Bound, 2015; Kreitzer, Hamilton, & Tolbert, 2014).

**Role of leadership.** Teachers and administrative staff serve as important leaders to develop safe and supportive school environments for all students. It is therefore important for school leadership to understand the implications when developing and implementing policy to truly connect to what methods are productive and successful, which requires sound dedication and reflection (Dinkins & Englert, 2015). Schools are largely shaped around heteronormative ideology, which can cause differences in how leadership in school systems addresses sexual diversity (Mayo, 2013). Silence is a general practice exhibited by institutional leadership, including faculty and staff, largely due to perceived ramifications and concerns for backlash when discussing such sensitive topics (Freedman et al., 2013). Beginning the conversation about the process of developing policy can be frightening for many but must be established by leadership to start working toward equitable outcomes for all students (Freedman et al. 2013; O'Malley & Caper, 2015).

Another challenge faced by leadership is biases and stereotypes from self and others. Newman and Fantus (2015) argued the importance of individuals engaging in the reflection process to limit the imposition of personal values and beliefs when discussing development of policy and practices for sexual minority youth. This can be difficult when such things as religion and sexual identity do not agree with sexual minority choices. Regardless, personal preferences of leadership must be placed aside to allow for policy and practice that limits victimization of youth that do not fall into the gender norms (Newman & Fantus, 2015; Taysum, 2016).

Taysum (2016) asserted that leadership is responsible for understanding student narratives authentically to best enhance the environment for all students, which requires dialog and a dedication to student experiences. Recognizing that all perspectives are important in shaping the environment for students can lead to development of a personal narrative that

continues to evolve by examining different dimensions; this requires the ability to appreciate differences and challenge personal biases (Fairtlough et al., 2013; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Taysum, 2016).

**Diversity training to facilitate change.** Diversity training for faculty and staff is critical to begin developing culturally competent leaders that value multiple perspectives and can recognize the need for equitable outcomes for all students regardless of biases and stereotypes (Taysum, 2016). Diversity training must first allow for leadership to engage in dialog across differences to confront social norms that can negatively affect sexual minority youth at their schools. This allows leadership to challenge established norms and discuss necessities for equity for all students (Asher, 2007).

Gedro (2010) explained that educational training should include sexual minority youth issues to establish conducive environments for all learners, but there are limitation and implications. Many policies are developed based on heterosexual norms and fail to enumerate and address sexual minority youth issues in schools (Payne & Smith, 2013). Breaking down the current policies that influence practices to determine how cultural norms influence standards by incorporating multiple perspectives is a way to analyze the current establishment and requires a sound understanding of the presence of systemic inequities despite personal beliefs (Asher, 2007; Payne & Smith, 2013).

Fairtlough et al. (2013) reported that educational leadership must continue to evaluate policy and practice to challenge cultural norms. To challenge cultural norms, there must be diversity training to raise awareness and an understanding of personal biases and stereotypes that contribute to the marginalization of sexual minority youth. Systemic change takes time and

effort, and there are multiple steps to take in positively helping sexual minority youth in the education system (Russell, Bohan, McCarroll, & Smith, 2011).

Institutional practices have been firm and have withstood extended periods of time requiring leadership to have resilience and dedication to bringing change with training that is specific and authentic in involving multiple perspectives (Russell et al., 2011). Slesaransky-Poe (2013) purported that it is the adults in the educational system that set the tone in welcoming all students and that a more comprehensive approach is necessary to establish a strong environment that invites and affirms all students regardless of being a sexual minority youth. This requires leaders to be effectively trained and dedicated to enhancing the experience for all students (Asher, 2007; Fairtlough et al., 2013; Payne & Smith, 2013; Russell et al., 2011; Taysum, 2016).

Community advocacy groups for sexual minority youth such as GLSEN and HRC offer diversity training to students, families, and schools that raise awareness of the issue and lend a sincere perspective on the topic (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). Robinson and Espelage (2012) discuss the challenges in discussing this topic due to stereotypes, biases, and a lack of diversity training for individuals at schools. Bringing in community advocates can provide another perspective on the topic. Advocates seek to encourage equitable practices to improve school environments for sexual minority youth and use substantial data from this population's firsthand experiences and outcomes (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018).

GLSEN (2018) has become a well-known network that uses nationwide school data that is used by multiple researchers to substantiate the need to advocate for sexual minority youth. Diversity training that is specific to this topic and deliberate in countering cultural norms and heteronormativity is a challenging task that should include multiple perspectives (GLSEN, 2016;

Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Community partnerships with such groups facilitates training that is centered on improving schools for sexual minority youth and includes different viewpoints.

### **Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

Researchers have focused on sexual minority youth due to the increase in reported bullying and harassment cases that can lead to such tragedies as suicide or self-harm (GLSEN, 2016). Multiple types of research have emerged to support understanding how educational systems can better support this population to ensure a safe environment that leads to successful outcomes. Researchers have used both qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach that shape the discovery of many important findings related to sexual minority youth, heteronormativity, leadership, and policy.

The review of research literature assists in developing an understanding of the mechanisms and comment on the methods used. Much of the research continues to show disparities of sexual minority youth, which is detrimental to the success and health of the population, but also seeks to identify solutions that will ensure the growth of inclusive school environments (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2011).

**Quantitative methods.** Adams and Lawrence (2014) noted that quantitative methods analyze relationships and links among variables to determine influences and outcomes. Researchers have used quantitative methods to conduct statistical analysis such as propensity score matches and Pearson's chi-square tests to determine relationships among given variables. All studies engage in obtaining anonymous responses to protect the confidentiality and identity of participants and hopefully gather honest responses.

Robinson and Espelage (2014) discussed that many sexual minority youths are fearful; therefore, they will not respond to questions or surveys openly, even when the survey is

anonymous. Researchers should work to create methods that assist in serving the needs of the participants while guaranteeing their anonymity. Understanding such needs can establish comfort and security to ensure accurate results without jeopardizing the validity of the data (Adams & Lawrence, 2014).

When administering surveys to students or staff, it can be beneficial to allow for collection to occur outside the school building. A strong method used by researchers in developing quantitative studies has been to limit outlier responses when performing statistical analysis. Research by Robinson and Espelage (2011) discussed that students can select responses randomly to complete the survey or deliberately select responses that do not actually fit personal truth. Using methods that can distinguish such participants so as not to include this data is imperative to ensure accuracy in findings.

Quantitative methods include power analysis protocol to determine the effective number of participants needed in a study (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). Participant numbers from this method are generally high in the hundreds and sometimes thousands, which allows the generalization of findings from the research questions to the population with smaller room for error. One weakness with quantitative surveys administered is that while they determine whether relationships exist among variables, they lack deep meaning or free expression of ideas by participants (Marchetti, 2015; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). This methodology allows for determining a strong link to variables for a given research question, which can be further expanded upon in future research.

Research by GLSEN (2016) assessed school climates across the country as one of the largest and most diverse studies to understand how sexual minority youth experience hostile school environments. Other research such as Robinson and Espelage (2012) and Slesaransky-

Poe (2013) frequently referenced the GLSEN (2016) study, which conducted an online survey gaining large participation rates through outreach methods. As one of the largest national advocates for sexual minority youth, GLSEN gathered data from 10,528 students, ranging in age from 13 to 21 participated from all states including the District of Columbia. This was significant in understanding the disparities in schools for this population, which showed sexual minority youth are still bullied and harassed in schools largely due to a lack of strong policies that govern procedures.

Using an outreach method and by having a strong presence in many communities, GLSEN (2016) had one of the more diverse studies on multiple levels, including race and geographic location. Considering that GLSEN used Internet methods to promote the survey, there could have been limitations in engaging student participants that did not have access to such technology. However, the study is still significant in better understanding this population.

**Qualitative methods.** Qualitative researchers have used different methods and strategies than quantitative researchers to provide insight to experiences with phenomena, but this method is no less scientific. Qualitative analysis assumes biases, including the researcher's own, and multiple perspectives are included to better understand and interpret findings. Credibility and trustworthiness are used as criteria to evaluate qualitative studies and there are multiple procedures to enhance these criteria (McMillan, 2012).

Much research surrounding sexual minority youth and the influence of leadership and policy has been examined by using qualitative methods such as coding, open-ended surveys, observation, narratives, and interviews (Dinkins & Englert, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Higgins, 2016; Russell et al., 2011). Deeper understanding of perspectives allows for

meaningful truth of lived experiences of participants to better comprehend the state of the situation, which is extremely beneficial with such a sensitive topic (McMillan, 2012).

Qualitative researchers who have used secondary sources from the literature review, such as policy that is already in place or past experiences reported by sexual minority youth, have determined how sexual minority youth experiences are affected by school environments. Most frequently in the research, policy and the link to sexual minority youth and heteronormativity were examined. Findings included various districts throughout the nation; however, the results have failed to provide specific demographic information. Primary research focused on lived experiences mostly through interviews and narratives.

As discussed by Adams and Lawrence (2014), the process of interviews and narratives is generally detailed and thorough, which limits the number of participants. Detailed subjective experiences lend critical insight to finding solutions to cultural phenomena and work with smaller populations. Findings from such studies have confirmed sexual minority youth experiencing discomfort in school environments and policies lacking explicit details of how to combat stereotypes and biases successfully (Mallinson, 2016; Snapp et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the value of perspectives and experiences through qualitative research remains critical to enhancing policy development and implementation by leadership (Russell et al., 2011).

Many of the qualitative studies reviewed for this study focused on policy and leadership. Galloway and Ishimaru (2015) used literature and prior research to develop leadership practices that were centered on sexual minority youth in schools. According to the authors, using common disparities experienced by sexual minority youth in schools, 'practices and standards were developed to challenge cultural norms that are largely due to heteronormativity. The secondary

sources determined the common disparities for sexual minority youth students from a more personal perspective.

Lythgoe (2013) also examined policy and how actionable steps to ensure the safety of sexual minority youth are lacking in many developed policies. The authors examined policy that protects this population of students through language analysis in policy by the method of coding. Sen et al. (2016) used the coding method to examine 100 syllabi submitted for a committee on diversity from more than 70 teachers finding a lack of diversity in goals, curriculum, and strategies. The coding method was then reviewed by an outside source to determine consistency and reliability. These two studies used coding methods to determine common themes from the research to state a claim. Methods of review are also common to help develop consistency throughout the research.

Another frequently used qualitative method to collect data has been observation, and includes research in the classroom, entire school, and professional development trainings. Dinkins and Englert (2015) conducted 24 hours of classroom observations focusing on learning and interactions of students and teachers. Audio-tape and software were used to analyze the data. The researchers explored experiences of sexual minority youth through the curriculum and school environment to better understand challenges of heteronormative assumptions that shape the school environment. The study involved an eighth-grade classroom of 24 students being introduced to a text with a homosexual character. Classroom observations revealed the importance of training on the topic of incorporating a homosexual character into instructional practices to engage in discussions of acceptance on this topic.

Higgins (2016) used an observation method to evaluate a board hearing on addressing sexual minority students in schools and the implementation of a policy specific to this

population. The author included quotes from participants on both sides of the argument, which is a method to gain multiple perspectives and better understand the situation. In the study, it is cited that 120 individuals spoke at the hearing with 49 in support and 69 against the passing the policy that would protect sexual minority students at a Michigan district.

It is essential to gather the data from multiple sources to better understand perspectives of an issue (Adams & Lawrence, 2012; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Much of the methodology presented in qualitative studies seeks to find perspectives during the research process. Overall, qualitative methods use observation, interviews, and open-ended surveys most frequently to gather data. Analyzing the data often used a coding method to determine results of the research.

**Mixed-methods.** Mixed-methods research has also been used to examine the variables of sexual minority youth, policy, and leadership. Surveys have dominated this type of research and included a variety of the number of participants from the thousands to barely above ten. Linking the quantitative and qualitative aspects have depended on the survey structure to allow for participants to easily respond to all types of questions. Using the survey method allowed for scale choices and then open-ended responses making data analysis simpler.

A major finding by researchers have included that policies and practices must be addressed by leadership in schools regarding sexual minority youth to develop more inclusive environments (O'Malley & Capper, 2015; Payne & Smith, 2013). The mixed-methods methodology concentrated on various individuals in schools such as youth, educators, and community to better understand how policy influences the culture of schools primarily using survey methods that were anonymous.

Mixed-methods research by Payne and Smith (2013) used a survey to interview school personnel about professional development experiences and the current state of the school

environment as it relates to sexual minority youth. A questionnaire was administered with interviews to follow up and expand on the scaled-choice questions. After analyzing narratives from educators through mixed method research, the authors argued that policies are grounded in heteronormativity, so it is important for school leadership to discuss policies that marginalize sexual minority youth and begin to implement change and develop a more inclusive environment.

Morrison, Jewell, McCutcheon, and Cochrane (2014) also engaged in mixed-method research using propensity score statistical analysis and an open-ended survey to evaluate a specific school climate. Sixty students ranging from 14 to 20 years of age participated in the anonymous study that used no incentives and allowed participants to drop out of the study at any time with no consequences. Findings were congruent with other methods of study that sexual minority youth are a population that struggle feeling safe and supported in schools.

**Techniques used to conduct research about sexual minority youth.** Research continues to show that sexual minority youth are at risk. There is an immediate need to develop and implement strategies and practices to improve such disparities (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Wilkerson, Schick, Romijnders, Bauldry, & Butame, 2016). Much of the research, both quantitative and qualitative, has used methods such as word of mouth or email to encourage a specific population to participate. Snowball sampling technique did not allow for results to be random, which can challenge the validity of the data among quantitative studies (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). Yet, qualitative studies do not set out to generalize findings. Incentives are beneficial in gathering more participation, thereby increasing sample populations, which can help better generalize findings (Adams & Lawrence, 2014; Grant & Sugarman, 2004).

The negative aspect of incentives is gaining participants that are only involved in the study for that reason. Incentives can also drive up the cost of research. It is important for research to embrace a variety of participants, which can be challenging when there is fear or mistrust among the population being studied. Encouragement through incentives or purposeful selection of participants can affect data (Adams & Lawrence, 2014 Grant & Sugarman, 2004). Research must consider such parameters and work to implement methods that capture authentic data.

Another component that must be considered is diversity of race and geographic location. Much of the data retrieved from studies has included limited analysis of urban areas or schools that primarily serve students of color. Data has captured an image of mostly White sexual minority youth, which has limited diverse perspectives of how policy is being implemented in all schools serving students. Research has showed the implementation of policy and practice can be largely based on resources, not limited to monetary foundations (Walker & Bates, 2016). Many geographical areas, such as rural and urban settings, have less access to resources such as GSAs in schools, limiting the access to supportive programs for students of color (Sinclair & Reece, 2016). It is important to consider this limitation in past research and focus on solutions for all students.

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

In understanding the methodological issues, this section begins by focusing on quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method research to determine the design and execution of such studies. Positive aspects and areas of limitations are suggested for each type of method. Primary and secondary research methods are then examined to show how sources affect data collection and understanding. Ethical considerations are discussed to provide sound reasoning

for protecting participants throughout research studies. Machi and McEvoy (2016) discussed the importance of readily identifying ethical decisions of studies, as participants' safety and consideration is the priority of any research method. The section ends with a discussion of how past research has a lack of racial diversity. Lacking such an important component demonstrates the importance of incorporating multiple perspectives in the research on sexual minority youth to further data collection and analysis on this topic.

**Challenges.** Research methods include a variety of approaches, involving both quantitative and qualitative methods. Such variation establishes better understanding of the problem through multiple perspectives and variables, but there are challenges with each type of method.

Quantitative researchers focus largely on propensity score matching and the least squares model. Much of the administration includes online surveys that are specific to networks that support sexual minority youth. To gain participation in studies on this population, outreach methods include advertisements and promotions through social media generally promoted by sexual minority programs. Such purposeful methods can create biases due to subjectivity of the topic to specific populations (Adams & Lawrence, 2014).

Findings through multiple anonymous surveys have discovered that sexual minority youth are bullied and harassed at school, causing discomfort and negative consequences (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Wilkerson, et al., 2016). Although there is useful information that proves to remain grounded for many years, understanding how leadership in schools can support sexual minority youth will require multiple perspectives beyond just the individuals that form a part of or advocate for the sexual minority youth population (Bishop & Atlas, 2015; Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Another challenge with quantitative research methods related to sexual minority youth is the length and depth of the surveys. Many of the surveys are short to conserve time and allow for greater participation causing a lack of deep meaningful or free expression of ideas by participants. Surveys measure relationships between independent and dependent variables, including student comfort, amount of bullying, feelings toward sexual minority issues, and policy comprehensiveness. Questions are usually written using a scale-model for participants to select a number ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with a statement. Answers are then analyzed using a least squares model or propensity score matching to allow researchers to determine trends or relationships between variables. These methods help determine the effects of policy and practices related to sexual minority youth in schools.

Past research has found that many policies are restricted to the explanation of the necessity of policy for sexual minority youth with limited to no actionable steps. Additionally, policies have lacked enumeration, which means steps are not provided to facilitate improving school environments for sexual minority youth (Fetner, 2016; Marchetti, 2015; Wilkerson et al., 2016). The research thus far has focused on advocating for policy development due to sexual minority youth discomfort. It is critical to move toward solution-oriented discussions using research designs that will provide more understanding in this area driven by challenging heterosexual norms (Mallinson, 2016).

Finding the correlation between values, attitudes, and policy is beneficial in determining how policy influences culture. This has dominated much of the quantitative research (Fetner, 2016; Mallinson, 2016) regarding sexual minority youth. Determining the effect of policy on challenging cultural norms such as heteronormativity shows how awareness is a step in bringing change for sexual minority youth as indicated by the quantitative studies on this topic. A caveat

when using quantitative methods, such as quick answer surveys to link variables, is being able to determine how variables impact personal views for specific individuals; however, it allows for a range of responses and high numbers of participants, which allows for more perspectives and ability to generalize findings (Adams & Lawrence, 2014).

Much of the research surrounding sexual minority youth and the effect of leadership and policy has been examined using qualitative methods such as coding, open-ended surveys, observation, narratives, and interviews (Dinkins & Englert, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Higgins, 2016; Russell et al., 2011). Difficulty in qualitative research methods includes the amount of time needed for retrieving and analyzing the data and determining how to analyze such in depth research to determine key components of the studies. This method allows for multiple deep perspectives on the topic, and when interpreted effectively it provides insight to the thoughts, ideas, and lived experiences of those that are a part of this phenomenon. Deeper understanding of perspectives allows for meaningful truth of lived experiences of participants to better comprehend the state of the situation, which is extremely beneficial with such a sensitive topic that can differ in perspective for multiple stakeholders (McMillan, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Mixed-method studies have similar difficulties in data retrieval and uses methods such as surveys, narratives, and interviews. Data has suggested that sexual minority youth struggle and there is a need for immediate intervention to support positive environments for all students (Bryan & Mayock, 2017; Meyer, Taylor, & Peter, 2015; Nevatia, Mahajan, & Shah, 2012). Mixed methods research often begins with an anonymous survey that uses propensity score matching or Pearson's chi-square analysis to report quantitative findings. An open-ended section is then provided for participants to expand on understanding the quantitative responses but often

had less participation than the choice or scale questions. Interviews and narratives are also common methods used to engage in after a survey, but also have much less participation due to the intense amount of time required (Adams & Lawrence, 2014).

Online survey administration is the most common data collection technique used to ensure confidentiality and ease for both participants and researchers while allowing for larger sample sizes. As discussed by Adams and Lawrence (2014), the software programs for coding data during analysis generate data trends quickly and efficiently. Gathering data can be challenging, but technology enhances the ability to reach more individuals in a shorter amount of time. Even with the abundance of technology, research must be careful to establish and maintain positive relationships with participants to establish an atmosphere of authenticity and trust to ensure valid data. Relationships built on trust helps participants willingness to engage in the research process, which is challenging but essential when examining personal experiences and perspectives (Adams & Lawrence, 2014; McMillan, 2012).

The ability to link quantitative and qualitative variables through mixed methods depends on the survey structure and the related components of study. Survey analysis through narratives is the most widely selected method of choice. Using questionnaires that allow for open-ended responses enables data analysis to be multi-functional.

Findings from Galloway and Ishimaru (2015) showed the need to begin challenging cultural norms by first raising awareness about sexual minority youth and then proposing policy that brings change. As a research community, there have been substantial methods that show there is a problem that exists in educational settings for sexual minority youth, but policy development has not been firmly established (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Lythgoe, 2013).

Research perspectives have not included school administration, which also limits the perspectives of understanding sexual minority youth experiences in schools.

**Ethical considerations.** In any study, a primary concern is confidentiality. The studies examined in this literature review engaged in anonymous responses to protect participants and in effort to gather honest responses (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; GLSEN, 2016; Lythgoe, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012).

Robinson and Espelage (2012) discussed that many sexual minority youths are fearful and will not respond to questions or surveys openly even when the survey is anonymous. This presents a challenge in obtaining information that is authentic and representative of the population. Adams and Lawrence (2014) discussed data collection as a process that must involve researcher analysis. Quantitative data analysis, including propensity score matching and least squares model, offers the ability for participants to engage in simple responses that are purposeful in suggesting and directing the subject matter. Nonetheless, many of the surveys have been proctored; meaning youth were being watched while completing questions (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). This can affect student comfort during the administration of the questions, can question the authenticity of confidentiality, and may cause inaccurate or more conservative responses (Robinson & Espelage, 2011).

Qualitative research allows the opportunity for multiple perspectives to be understood on sensitive issues such as described above, but with fear being a factor due to the nature of the topic, it can be difficult to discuss for sexual minority youth. The research methods reviewed were confidential and used proper methods such as pseudo-names to ensure privacy (Adams & Lawrence, 2014; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; GLSEN, 2016; Lythgoe, 2013). Reaching out to specific school districts or to programs that are advocates for sexual minority youth has become

general practice to gather data because of the topic being so sensitive and to gain more participants (Craig & Dorian, 2015; GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012).

Quantitative and qualitative methods, including surveys, narratives, and observations, have lacked random sampling, incentives, or participation has been low when conducting sexual minority youth research (Ciszek, 2014; Freedman et al., 2013; Pfeffer, 2012; Snapp et al., 2015). It is important for the individuals conducting the research to understand the participant's needs in order to create data collection methods that are comfortable for participants. Researchers also must ensure accurate results without jeopardizing the validity of the data (Adams & Lawrence, 2014).

It has been challenging to find and support participants in research on the topic of sexual minority youth. This difficulty demonstrates the challenges associated with conducting research with this at-risk population. There is a need for more research and efforts related to equality for all students in schools.

**Primary and secondary methods.** Research regarding sexual minority youth has included both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are beneficial when providing details and insight to sexual minority youth issues from immediate perspectives. However, research from the primary perspective has proven to be difficult in obtaining because it requires consent from participants and an understanding of where to find individuals that are willing to participate in such studies.

Surveys are widely used as a primary research method for the topic of sexual minority youth because surveys quickly gather multiple data variables. Narratives are also a primary research method used and involve exceptional amounts of time to develop and articulate through coding analysis. Similarly, secondary sources involve coding methods that require time and

multiple steps to ensure accuracy and validity. Secondary sources are from a variety of regions, expanding nationwide understanding of sexual minority youth and policy development. Many of the secondary source methods include multiple state and district analysis, expanding the range of research throughout multiple areas, whereas primary source data is generally limited to specific geographical locations.

Primary source researchers gather information from sources in direct contact with the participants largely in-person through email or by phone. Although challenging to accomplish, the reader is subjected to understanding first-hand perspectives and experiences. This is helpful to gain new insight on how development of new initiatives affects sexual minority youth. Secondary sources largely focus on state and district policy to develop a relationship between policy acceptance, leadership, and disparities in schools (Cruells & Coll-Planas, 2013; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Researchers engage in secondary sources to develop ideology and better understand influence of policy on sexual minority youth standards and outcomes (Cruells & Coll-Planas, 2013; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Robertson & Hill, 2014). Understanding trends throughout many different locations is essential for future research development, but it limits the reader to past influences. Both primary and secondary research is critical to understating sexual minority youth and has both positive and negative aspects in data collection methods.

**Need for adult perspective.** Adults are a strong component in schools that can attempt to implement equitable policy and practices for sexual minority youth (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Most researchers have focused on students and the comfort of sexual minority youth within schools. Some research has emerged regarding faculty and staff in schools and the effect of such a powerful group on creating a safe environment for all students, but there is a limited amount of

research on the perspectives and experiences of this population as well as the perspective of sexual minority advocacy organizations that offer support to schools.

Slesaransky-Poe (2013) explained the need for adults in schools to engage in diversity training and development to create a more comprehensive understanding of how to support sexual minority youth. Research has centered on educators being able to support sexual minority youth through targeted practices that mitigate and prevent bullying and harassment and demonstrates a strong need for awareness and training (Freedman et al., 2013; Sinclair & Reece, 2016; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Yet, there is a lack of administrator perspective due to the large focus on educators and other faculty such as counselors that regularly interact with a group of students. With research showing faculty and staff discomfort because of the perception of a lack of support by school administration, it is imperative to also work toward developing the perspective of the administration on this topic (Marshall, Yarber, Sherwood-Laughlin, Gray, & Estell, 2015; Sinclair & Reece, 2016).

**Lack of diversity.** Research pertaining to sexual minority youth has lacked diverse populations and regions. Largely grounded in predominantly Caucasian communities, racially diverse perspectives on this topic are limited resulting in trends and linking variables to be narrow in development of ideology. One study engaged a Hispanic population regarding sexual minority youth. The findings were like suburban research of mostly Caucasian populations that sexual minority youth of Hispanic descent are limited in resources and are often excluded due to the heteronormative culture (Castro & Sujak, 2012).

Moving forward it would be beneficial to examine the degree to which exclusion is felt and if policy and practices are more readily implemented in certain areas or within certain racial populations. Research conducted by GLSEN (2016) explained that sexual minority youth who

are comfortable participating in a school climate survey show an increase in negative thoughts due to bullying and harassment, but there has been a positive change with the awareness and implementation of policies and practices that support the sexual minority population. It will be more useful to understand how school environments support all youth by intersecting sexual minority studies with different ethnic and racial groups and settings. Singleton and Linton (2006) discussed the affect racial culture can play on perspectives and outcomes. With the lack of research that intersects sexual minority youth with racial minorities, research must expand to develop studies that work toward a better overall understanding of policy and practice implementation for all ethnicities.

**Future development.** Each type of research method regarding sexual minority youth has both advantages and disadvantages collecting, reporting, and understanding data. Machi and McEvoy (2016) explained the importance of determining methods to use to maintain valid and authentic practices that gather appropriate data. Sexual minority youth studies are sensitive, which can cause difficulties in gaining participation or in participants not being truly honest when answering questions (Robinson & Espelage, 2011). Future studies surrounding this topic must be careful to develop methods that are supportive but allow for random sampling techniques. Further, it is suggested to increase awareness of this topic from the administrator perspective within schools and through recruitment of racially diverse sexual minority youth to enhance understanding of the topic by linking variables across more groups of individuals (Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Methodology must incorporate not only different techniques including both quantitative and qualitative methods but must also consider evaluating different individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences. This will encourage

multiple perspectives on a topic that is necessary to continue to challenge ensuring better outcomes for all students.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

This section involves synthesizing the review of literature that details the commonalities within the studies that have shaped reality for sexual minority youth. A detailed explanation of the structures that prevent serving this population fully within schools was examined and trends were discovered through multiple data sources. Suggestions for change are varied but center on developing training for faculty and staff to raise awareness and the ability to proactively supports sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012).

Complex social systems such as cultural norms and heteronormativity are widely discussed and contribute meaning to understanding disparities of sexual minority youth. Researchers have determined meaningful understanding of the issue and trends that have become a part of school culture to better establish sexual minority youth as a topic of discussion so that the problems are mitigated, and schools are safe. Understanding the trends from past research helps develop and conduct future research that is sound in developing successful educational environments for all students.

**Discrimination.** Studies reported that sexual minority youth experience discrimination at school at an increased rate compared to heteronormative youth, which results in negative outcomes (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Robinson and Espelage (2012) explained that many students are bullied in schools regardless of sexual orientation, but heterosexual youth have higher rates of suicide, reports of skipping school, and unexcused absences. When students are bullied or harassed, schools cannot support initiatives to prevent or mitigate the consequences from the actions often due to lack of awareness and resources (Bishop

& Atlas, 2015; Mallinson, 2016; Newman & Fantus, 2015). Many faculty and staff have reported feeling afraid or apprehensive to assist or speak out for a student that is a sexual minority because of a lack of firm procedures or perceived consequences from administration (Freedman et al., 2013; Mayo, 2013). Educational practices must strive to enhance education models and allow for sincere advocacy of sexual minority youth without repercussions, both perceived and actual (Craig, Doiron, & Dillon, 2015; Mayo, 2013; Morrison et al., 2014; Newman & Fantus, 2015).

School climate continues to be widely studied, and research shows a deficiency in the topic of sexual minority youth in diversity trainings, curriculum and instruction, and policy development (Freedman et al., 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). This limits the ability to openly discuss differences in sexuality, which is a reality for some individuals (Freedman et al., 2013; O'Malley & Capper, 2015). School climate does not allow for students to fully explore and express sexual identity causing internal discomfort and lack of perceived support when youth do not conform to sexual norms (Freedman et al., 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012).

Due to the structures and standards established by school policies and procedures, sexual minority youth are not fully supported, which creates inequalities among students. Studies have examined the curriculum and instruction of many institutional systems and have found a severe lack in the ability to incorporate sexual minority experiences into classroom practices (Dinkins, & Englert, 2015; Freedman et al., 2013; O'Malley & Capper, 2015). With the lack of such an important discussion, biases and stereotypes will continue to perpetuate school environments causing discomfort or limitations for sexual minority youth and limiting understanding of differences for all students (Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013).

**Culture.** Although campus climate is studied at an alarming rate showing many disparities for sexual minority youth, the topic of school culture continues to be avoided by school personnel according to researchers (GLSEN, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2017; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Limiting biases and stereotypes will require the discussion of culture to effectively implement policies and procedures in schools that combat social norms (Mayo, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Embedded within the school culture are values and beliefs that can be indifferent or negative toward sexual minority youth (Fairtlough et al., 2013; Ozdemer & Buyukgoze, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012).

Values and beliefs are rarely challenged out of fear or discomfort, limiting the advancement of school culture to embrace differences (Ozdemer & Buyukgoze, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). This is shown in the lack of ability of faculty and staff to address sexual minority issues as well as limited discussion and implementation into curriculum and instruction (Fairtlough et al., 2013; Ozdemer & Buyukgoze, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). There have been positive advancements such as alliances and clubs formed in many schools, which correlates with a more positive culture for sexual minority youth by providing affirmation and understanding (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). However, working toward a supportive environment will require understanding and challenging imbedded norms that are a result of systems rooted in a heteronormative culture.

**Policy and procedure.** Challenging policies and procedures grounded in societal systems must begin with the awareness of sexual minority youth and how biases and stereotypes affect this population. There must be multiple perspectives that can advocate for the development of policies and procedures that mitigate negative outcomes and truly embrace the needs of sexual minority youth (Mayo, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Espelage,

2012). Culture is not always a consideration when developing standards such as policy when there are limited individuals that are a part of the process due to a lack of different perspectives and experiences (Castro, & Sujak, 2012; Payne & Smith, 2013). Sexual minority representation can be limited when the policy development process occurs, which is contradictory to ensuring this population is adequately represented (Mayo, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Esplelage, 2012). Biases and stereotypes will continue to plague sexual minority youth discussions when working toward developing policies and practices if there is not a diverse representation of all groups during all processes of development, implementation, and feedback (Castro, & Sujak, 2012; Marshall, Yarber, Sherwood-Laughlin, Gray, & Estell, 2015; Mayo, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Esplelage, 2012).

**Diversity training for change.** Biases and stereotypes are embedded in societal norms and can go unchallenged due to lack of awareness and understanding or fear of repercussions from the majority population in a school context (Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Singleton & Linton, 2006). For authentic change to occur in schools, policy makers, including faculty and staff, must be trained with the ability to recognize biases and stereotypes that exist in society, and more importantly, those that are personal (Kreitzer, Hamilton, Tolbert, 2014; Mallinson, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012).

Research by Robinson and Espelage (2011) explained that school personnel are major contributors to homophobic school climates due to the nature of cultural experiences. Homophobic remarks will go unchecked by school personnel unlike other discriminatory remarks such as racist or sexist remarks, which allows for homophobia to prevail and become a cultural norm. Faculty and staff must become aware of how allowing derogatory remarks and sexual minority discrimination to occur perpetuates the biases and stereotypes typical of a

heteronormative culture. Without being aware of the issues sexual minority youth face by engaging in learning opportunities, effective change cannot occur (Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013).

Diversity training for faculty and staff should incorporate cultural competence to better understand the sexual minority population and how to best mitigate negative circumstances in schools, yet this does not often occur due to discomfort among faculty and staff, the prioritizing of other initiatives, or a lack of resources available to accomplish diversity training. Diversity training and discussion about sexual minority youth in schools is critical to enhance the school environment and learning experience for this population (Bishop & Casida, 2011; Craig et al., 2015; Marshall et al., 2015).

Craig et al. (2015) conducted a primary evaluation of intervention services to sexual minority youth using a random sample of 2,850 participants. Findings indicated that developing professional allies should include trainings for faculty and staff in schools that work to encourage positive alternatives to homophobic attitudes and effective communication strategies. The authors argued that diversity training, which seeks to develop affirmative education practices and interventions, can enhance the education model to advocate for sexual minority youth by providing positive alternatives to negativity within the school environment. It is imperative to develop the leaders of the school building, such as administration, using purposeful training that allows for better understanding of sexual minority youth challenges and needs (Bishop & Casida, 2011; Craig et al., 2015; Marshall et al., 2015).

When leadership is unaware of the challenges faced by sexual minority youth, it becomes difficult to implement change (Freedman et al., 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Sinclair & Reece, 2016; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Sinclair and Reece (2016) explained that traditions that

are grounded in heteronormativity and reinforce sexual minority exclusion are perpetuated by the school administration making it difficult for educators to challenge common policies and practices. Using a secondary evaluation of policies and laws impact on sexual minority youth, it was argued that administration's support for sexual minority youth can be limited due to lack of understanding sexual minority issues and being able to establish effective structures in schools suggesting the need for training. Dinkins and Englert (2015) discussed that training is necessary for school personnel to engage in but must be deliberate in first bringing awareness about sexual minority youth to the forefront to ensure recognition of the problem.

Effective diversity training must include discussion about awareness that a problem exists and an understanding of why the problem exists (Dinkins & Englert, 2015; Freedman et al., 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Sinclair & Reece, 2016). Castro and Sujak (2012) conducted several interviews that revealed trainings about sexual minority youth are rarely offered, and when there are, such offerings are not mandatory. The authors stated, "Faculty had not received adequate training on how to address issues related to sexual minorities in the classroom or in the curriculum" (p. 458). This transcends to a lack of visibility, understanding, and representation of sexual minority perspectives in schools becoming a vicious cycle of disservice to sexual minority students (Castro & Sujak, 2012; GLSEN, 2016).

Awareness of an issue can bring about a recognition of how serious the problem is and should involve full participation of faculty and staff in a comprehensive training to develop an understanding of social and cultural influences that perpetuate discrimination (Castro & Sujak, 2012; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Training will therefore be beneficial to all members of the school system for individual and collective development to better serve sexual minority students (Craig et al., 2015; Freedman et al., 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2011).

**Structural influences.** Recognizing heteronormativity and cultural norms takes awareness and reflection, which requires the compassion and dedication to challenge oneself while valuing other perspectives. Heteronormativity and cultural norms are not automatically understood or recognized by those that are a part of a majority population, thus many issues faced by sexual minority youth go unnoticed (Craig et al., 2015; Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Singleton & Linton, 2006). McNeill (2013) analyzed federal and state sexuality educational laws and discovered that it is important to investigate heteronormative structures and cultures to raise critical questions on how to better serve sexual minority youth. Without a strong understanding of how heteronormativity and cultural norms affect decisions about structures that affect sexual minority youth, strong questioning to bring positive changes cannot occur. Raising awareness first to engage multiple perspectives on sexual minority youth issues will help individuals better understand the crisis of the population, hopefully triggering compassion and desire for positive change.

Freedman et al. (2013) explored structural influences in schools and the effect on faculty and staff decisions to address sexual minority topics. Findings indicated that structuralism and heteronormativity, grounded in biases and stereotypes, limit the ability for faculty and staff to effectively navigate topics and issues related to sexual minority youth. Researchers that conduct studies using semi-standardized interviews showed educators are interested in discussing sexual minority topics to better understand the population's needs and how to create a safer school environment that is inclusive of multiple perspectives but are fearful of consequences of addressing such topics with school administrators. Although negative in the aspect of being able to discuss sexual minority youth with administration in the school, it is positive that educators feel the need to help sexual minority youth and are willing to engage in opportunities to do so.

Challenging norms and standards that are largely heteronormative and that have been in place for extended periods of time is a difficult task (Freedman et al., 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013).

Structuralism and heteronormativity influence policies and practices of school environments and creates risks in challenging rules (Freedman et al., 2013). Policy and practice are largely grounded in heteronormativity, which can cause challenges for sexual minority youth (Mayo, 2013; Newman & Fantus, 2015). Mayo (2013) used secondary research to examine sexual minority history and the impact of policy on schools addressing sexual complexities. Mayo's research showed that policy is rooted in cultural norms driven by heteronormativity and is related to the rights of sexual minorities being restricted. The political nature of the topic transcends to schools' efforts to address sexual minority youth disparities, but often falls short due to oversimplifying the degree of the situation or ignoring difficult topics to remain neutral. Newman and Fantus (2015) examined systems that shape the construct of norms and bullying through past narratives finding that policies are not developed well enough to effectively address structures and ideologies embedded in homophobic biases and stereotypes. Powerful influences such as law and policy affect the sexual minority youth population creating disparities and the lack in ability to challenge cultural norms and heteronormativity.

Commonalities from research have shown how cultural norms and heteronormativity have shaped the current environment for sexual minority youth. Training that first focuses on awareness and understanding is largely suggested and shows a positive effect on participants attitude toward the topic (Dinkins & Englert, 2015; Freedman et al., 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Sinclair & Reece, 2016). The individuals who develop the content, which drives practice, shape the policy. The lack of multiple perspectives in this process has allowed for policy that

limits the advancement of sexual minority youth due to being grounded in cultural norms and heteronormativity (Mayo, 2013; Newman & Fantus, 2015). It can be difficult to challenge social constructs to make advancements in policy when there is fear as is the case for school educators fearing the backlash of administrators (Freedman et al., 2013).

Schools must focus on developing the administrators and the educators to ensure comfort in sharing perspectives and experiences to improve the environment for sexual minority youth. Research has suggested the need to expand to include a more racially diverse population when examining sexual minority youth to generalize findings (Freedman et al., 2013; Higgins, 2016; McNeill, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). When synthesizing the data and findings, it is important to consider this limitation in future research.

### **Critique of Previous Research**

Previous research on the topic of sexual minority youth shows commonalities and trends that indicate a need for immediate advocacy for this population to improve the school environment (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). The critique of the research in this section allows for the assessment of evidence, claims, and concepts in relation to aspects in the real world (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). This section examines research methods including sampling techniques to challenge and affirm previous research. Examples of techniques will be discussed along with the effect of the techniques on findings. As research continues to advance concerning sexual minority youth, there must be efforts to understand through sound evaluation the areas to improve and how concepts can be challenged. A key component to this discussion is that there is a struggle to recruit sexual minority youth participants due to the nature and sensitivity of the subject. Techniques used to obtain higher rates of participation begin this section with a review of the effect on the research findings.

**Discomfort in schools.** Although sampling techniques are varied throughout the research of sexual minority youth, involves methods such as snowball sampling, and rewards for participation, the claim that sexual minority youth experience bullying and harassment in schools more frequently than their peers is valid (Dinkins & Englert, 2015; GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Dinkins and Englert (2015) used an observation technique to gain insight to the learning and interactions of students and teachers, which was then coded using software to analyze the educational environment. Findings indicated sexual minority students are not able to fully explore and express their identity due to heteronormative cultures and leadership that is not fully trained or able to understand issues related to this population. This heteronormative environment has led to discomfort and lack of the ability to address negative slurs toward sexual minority youth. As opposed to other marginalized populations, sexual minority youth experience negative slurs more frequently than other marginalized populations with no consequences to those that are responsible (GLSEN, 2016; Dinkins & Englert, 2015; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). When this occurs, it becomes a vicious cycle of marginalization, which is an accurate perspective as seen from a variety of research methods and techniques.

In Dinkins and Englert's (2015) research, one limitation was a small sample size of 24 participants whereas Robinson and Espelage (2012) reported a large sample size of 11,337, which helps generalize the findings to the population. Dinkins and Englert were limited in this aspect due to using qualitative methodology of intense classroom observation. Both studies had geographical imitations as well as limited racial diversity of participants. Dinkins and Englert (2015) observed an eighth-grade classroom of 24 students, which limited extending the findings to the entire population. Additionally, students that were absent could not participate in the research and the racial diversity was not explored.

Robinson and Espelage (2012) explained a limitation in their study was a lack of racial diversity since it only included a county in Wisconsin, which also limited the research geographically. Another limitation was that the research might not include the full sexual minority spectrum, as the survey did not ask for sexual identity or sexual attraction. The authors also asserted having no causal claims as the research was a comparative analysis limiting the idea of multiple pathways for analysis of data.

**Gaining participation.** As aforementioned, techniques such as snowball sampling, rewards, and outreach are common methods in recruiting participants for research. Researchers engage in such strategies to gain more participation and increase perspectives and experiences in the study (GLSEN, 2016; Pastrana, 2014; Snapp et al., 2015). Gaining perspectives when studying sexual minority youth is important to generalize findings and make claims that assert real-world occurrences (GLSEN, 2006; Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Studies have often claimed that school culture and climate severely lack sexual minority perspectives not only in anti-discrimination efforts, but also in the classroom curriculum and instruction, which is grounded in multiple studies (Castro & Sujak, 2012; GLSEN, 2016; Patterson, 2013; Snapp et al., 2015). Methods to determine this claim include both quantitative and qualitative methods. Even with the use of incentives or outreach the commonality of findings include curriculum and instruction do not include sexual minority perspectives.

Snapp et al. (2015) used a survey technique that was networked through sexual minority community advocacy centers. Participants answered eight open-ended questions regarding experiences in schools, which show that teachers are unable or unwilling to intervene and do not include sexual minority experiences in the curriculum and instruction. Participants in the study were awarded monetary compensation, which is discussed as a limitation, but also as a strategy

to increase geographic diversity. Castro and Sujak (2015) used interviews with sexual minority youth and personnel to explore inclusion. Findings from formal and written interview questions included the need for visibility, understanding, and representation of sexual minority perspectives in schools, which is not supported by the school environment or curriculum. Although no incentives were utilized, the research only included participants from one school with racial background limiting the ability to generalize the findings. Each research method was limited in a factor, but findings from all research shows the trend of a lack of inclusion of sexual minority perspectives in schools, which does not allow for curriculum and instruction to fully infuse this population into teaching and learning (Castro & Sujak, 2012; GLSEN, 2016; Patterson, 2013; Snapp et al., 2015).

**How culture and climate are perpetuated.** Stereotypes and biases that go unchallenged in schools limit the ability for the culture and climate to advance and become fully inclusive of all students, which is evident in the development of policy and practice (Bryan & Mayock, 2017; Mayo, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Esplelage, 2012). This claim is marked by an abundance of research using multiple efforts and techniques.

Bryan and Mayock (2017) used primary research methods to explore educational systems' characterization of sexual minority youth. Using a mixed-methods survey, the authors found that there is fear by faculty, staff, and students to engage in dialog pertaining to this topic, which further marginalizes the population through biases and stereotypes grounded in heteronormativity. Mayo (2013) used secondary research to examine sexual minority youth history of heteronormative environments shaped by biases and stereotypes. There is a complexity uncovered that also shows heteronormative practices that limit moving the conversation about sexual minority youth forward. Research on the topic of heteronormativity

uses a variety of sources from different school policies across the nation to examine and critique through current software that is valid in coding the data to determine trends that suggest biases and stereotypes are a part of sexual minority youth lives and influence the school environment (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Lythgoe, 2013; Mayo, 2013).

Policy and practice are largely shaped by heteronormativity, and cultural norms are a contingent claim based on the evaluation of stereotypes and biases from multiple sources using both primary and secondary research. Primary research using an anonymous survey by GLSEN (2016) showed communities that are supportive of sexual minority youth, as shown by community engagement, GSA's, and programs targeting sexual minority youth, more readily have policies in place for schools that address sexual minority youth issues. Although policy is in place, GLSEN also found this does not mean it is understood or implemented correctly. Diem and Young (2015) also supported this claim. Using secondary methods to conduct a critical policy analysis, the authors found that traditional policy must be interrogated to challenge traditional policy through multiple perspectives. Research involving policy has shown such trends in policy needing improvement but there must be a consideration for lack of participation in the research and the need for more racial diversity.

**Considerations and limitations.** Using techniques to increase the number of participants does not necessarily invalidate data or claims from past research but should be considered when discussing limitations and ways to advance future research (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). It is not clear how many sexual minority youth participants will not publicly identify for several reasons, mostly due to fear, but research must consider this when examining the topic of sexual minority youth in schools (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). For

sexual minority youth to feel comfortable, there must first be comfort in the school environment, which begins with the leadership, such as administrators (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013).

Studies have included the perspectives of sexual minority youth and educators but have not included administrators or district level employees' perspectives. Studies also have not included the perspectives of sexual minority advocacy organizations. Movements to challenge cultural norms to improve the quality of life for sexual minorities must include leadership at all levels in the educational system. Similarly, research must consider racial diversity instead of focusing largely on geographical diversity.

Gaining insight to multiple perspectives to generalize findings becomes challenging when racial diversity is lacking. With an increase in studies reporting improvements for sexual minority youth, it is important to value perspectives and experiences of all racial backgrounds to generalize findings (Freedman et al., 2013; Kreitzer et al., 2014; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Researchers offers limited descriptions of the diversity of the population for many of the studies making the reader wonder the demographics of the population (Fairtlough et al., 2013; Marchetti, 2015; Taysum, 2016).

Taysum (2016) interviewed educational leaders participating in a doctoral program to gain insight to the educational alignment to leading organizational change by incorporating diversity such as sexual minority topics into discussions with school staff. Past studies lack demographic descriptions of participants limiting generalizability of the findings, specifically that participants report that it is necessary to enhance the cultural alignment of education to embrace more diverse students (Fairtlough et al., 2013; Marchetti, 2015; Taysum, 2016). Cultures can differ in perspectives of sexual minority topics and must be considered when trying to improve the school environment (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Taysum, 2016).

Much of the research examined for this study specifically describes a limitation as being a lack of racial diversity warranting more studies that focus on this component (Bruce, 2013; Freedman et al., 2013; Pfeffer, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Pastrana (2014) focused on the African American community through an outreach to community organizations to administer a survey. Findings showed an increase in how cultural norms frame structures within the community to support sexual minority youth in feeling comfortable sharing personal sexuality status. The author explained factors that included but are not limited to religious faith, relationship status, and perceived family support. The methodology included snowball-sampling techniques that did not allow for a random sample recognized by the researcher because of the lack of participation and support on this topic within the African American community.

Casto and Sujak (2012) examined students of Hispanic decent at a specific school that was reflective of the larger community. Six formal interviews of faculty and staff in a largely working-class suburb high school of Hispanic students found sexual minority culture is rarely discussed or implemented in schools through curriculum, guest speakers, or images. Although trainings are offered on this topic, it is not mandatory resulting in low attendance and the discussion easily avoidable. This research is beneficial when trying to understand differences in racial perspectives of sexual minority youth. Moving forward it will be useful to study different demographics to better generalize findings.

Commonalities and trends that have developed claims pertaining to sexual minority youth are well supported through a variety of research. Researchers have largely focused on students and faculty within schools; therefore, efforts to gain school leadership perspectives on this topic can have a profound effect on advancing school environments for sexual minority youth. Additionally, racial diversity is severely lacking, as much of the research fails to provide this

information or mentions this as a limitation. Claiming that sexual minority youth experience discrimination is evident and proven through many students being fearful of identifying themselves, which has been experienced by researchers having to use techniques such as incentives to recruit participants (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Starting with the leadership in the school and being deliberate with diversity of participants can be beneficial in moving forward to begin the conversation on how to better serve the sexual minority youth population.

### **Summary**

The literature review has distinctly developed the argument for research to continue to advance to better serve sexual minority youth in schools. Beginning with the introduction, a compelling case is presented that sexual minority youth experience disparities in schools that are directly related to the structures of culture impacted by policy and practice grounded in heteronormativity. Inequities related to this population should be examined and studied to better implement strategies that minimize the disparities. Leadership roles in schools are critical to this advancement but have fallen short on serving this population, which suggests training and policy development and implementation specific to sexual minority youth is necessary (GLSEN, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2013). Additionally, research dedicated to leadership roles is limited and warrants further study (Payne & Smith, 2013; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013).

This review of literature clearly indicates how the frequency of contact with inner city school personnel, including leadership, by sexual minority advocacy organizations affects diversity training that is requested in schools and how diversity training influences the interest in policy development specific to sexual minority youth. Policy and practice shape the climate and culture of the school environment, which is generally grounded in heteronormativity (GLSEN,

2016; Sen et al., 2016). Research has focused largely on how heteronormativity and cultural norms shape policy and practice forming a large part of the conceptual framework. Challenges, due to the biases and stereotypes generated by heteronormativity and cultural norms continue to limit the advancement of policy and practice, which is difficult for school personnel to challenge, particularly when leadership is not supportive or aware of the issue (Mallinson, 2016; Newman & Fantus, 2015). Although there have been advancements in developing policy and procedures for sexual minority youth, multiple perspectives that are authentic and able to challenge the system are necessary when considering equitable outcomes for this population (Barrett & Bound, 2015; Kreitzer, Hamilton, Tolbert, 2014; Taylor et al., 2012). Leadership is a key component to implementing equitable changes to culturally grounded systems, but leaders must be trained on the issue of sexual minority youth first through awareness and then being able to recognize how culture shapes disparities and how to challenge systems (Fairtlough et al., 2013; Russell et al., 2011).

Studies to learn about trends and commonalties on the topic of sexual minority youth included multiple methodologies involving quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches. Each method has positive and negative aspects to how the study was conducted, the findings, and the understanding by the reader. Quantitative methods allow for larger numbers for participation and generally use survey methods but are limited on developing personal narratives of experiences (McMillan, 2012). Qualitative studies enable research to become more personal through narratives and interviews but take dedication to the process (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). Mixed-methods also relied on survey techniques to gather research to link quantitative and qualitative aspects. Such variation in the types of methodologies allow for findings to be substantiated by multiple researchers; most commonly that sexual minority youth are not

comfortable in schools and that faculty and staff are not equipped with the capacity to challenge norms to make positive changes for this population (GLSEN, 2016; O'Malley & Capper, 2015; Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012).

Limitations to research most commonly discussed are the lack of willingness of participation and diversity. Participation on the topic of sexual minority youth is challenging because it is not widely discussed and can be uncomfortable or cause fear, so techniques that are questionable are used (GLSEN, 2016; Pastrana, 2014; Snapp et al., 2015).

Although it does not invalidate the research, it must be considered for future studies to try to gain authentic participation that allows for multiple perspectives. Lack of racial diversity is a severe limitation in most studies that must also be addressed in the future to better gain insight to all sexual minority youth experiences to truly generalize findings (Bruce, 2013; Freedman, Shultz, & Hoffman, 2013; Pfeffer, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Additionally, research should include perspectives of leaders in schools, such as administration, as well as, district leaders that often shape school policy and practice (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Schools should support all students and work to specifically address sexual minority youth issues to better serve this population (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Leaders throughout all diverse settings must be aware of this issue to begin working toward solutions and to challenge cultural norms and heteronormativity (Elias, 2017; Newman & Fantus, 2015; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). Inner city schools are no exception to the need of better serving sexual minority youth in schools through development of policy and practice that is conducive to the unique needs of the population that will establish equitable outcomes. Research has not focused strongly on inner city areas regarding sexual minority youth deeming it critical to begin the process beginning with leadership and sexual minority advocacy organizations.

Moving toward challenging cultural norms and heteronormative policy and practice will better establish safe and supportive school environments are necessary for all students including sexual minority youth. This will be a lengthy process requiring dedicated leaders and school staff to begin implementing changes after understanding how personal biases and stereotypes perpetuate poor school environments for students. By starting with awareness and authentic conversations, surrounding the topic of positive change for sexual minority youth can then begin to be understood by those that shape the school culture. This study incorporated the feedback from sexual minority advocacy organizations that serve inner city schools to determine if the frequency of contact with inner city school personnel affects diversity training requested by educators and if the diversity training leads to policy development specific to sexual minority youth.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introduction

Action must be taken to better understand how to incorporate equitable policy and practices to better serve sexual minority youth in schools. Research shows that heteronormativity drives cultural norms, which limits the advancement of sexual minorities and can make the school environment uncomfortable for sexual minority youth (Dinkins & Englert, 2015; GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Equitable policies and practices can be a method used to ensure better outcomes for sexual minority youth and have become increasingly notable in schools and districts (GLSEN, 2016; Mallinson, 2016). Policy should include detailed examples and actionable steps that support sexual minority youth in addition to working toward a safe school environment (Acevedo-Polakovich, Bell, Gamache, & Christian, 2011; Mallinson, 2016).

Policy must be understood by leadership in school districts to be implemented properly and ensure validity of practice (Mallinson, 2016; Robertson & Hill, 2014). Diversity training provided by outside advocates can facilitate the inclusion of multiple perspectives that are directly linked to sexual minority youth and offer innovative ideas towards the development of equitable policies and practices (Gedro, 2010; GLSEN, 2018). Diversity training for this study was defined as training that enables awareness and advances support measures of sexual minority students.

According to the school climate survey conducted by GLSEN (2016), sexual minority youth, or those that are perceived as sexual minorities, experience bullying and harassment, and can feel unsupported in schools. There are negative outcomes and consequences for this population due to a school environment that is not conducive for sexual minority youth to feel

comfortable and learn, which has been well documented by research (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Slesaransky-Poe 2013). Such outcomes include suicide, attempted suicide, negative self-esteem, and skipping school all of which negatively affect learning (GLSEN, 2016). Additionally, there is a lack of sexual minority perspective in such things as curriculum and instruction that could better allow for awareness and sensitivity pertaining to this topic (Castro & Sujak, 2012; Patterson, 2013).

Education systems in the United States serve a diverse population of students, including sexual minority students who can struggle due to unsupportive environments and a culture that is biased (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Suggested social justice programs that incorporate diversity training first bring awareness to the issue and substantiates that all students, regardless of sexual orientation, must be provided with an education that is safe and supportive (GLSEN, 2018; Patterson, 2013). Leadership in schools play a significant role in establishing the culture and climate and must value the experiences and perspectives of sexual minority youth (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Better understanding how organizations that focus on increasing sexual minority youth outcomes that serve inner city schools in diversity training lends a perspective on whether leadership personnel are incorporating diversity training and policy into schools.

The following section discusses the research design for this study in detail and demonstrates how theory turns into action. Sections of the chapter include the purpose of the study, the research questions, hypotheses, research design, target populations, instrumentation, data collection, operationalization of variables, data analysis procedures, limitations, internal and external validity, expected findings, and ethical issues. Topics that encompass the conceptual framework, which included cultural norms, heteronormativity, diversity training, policy and

practice, and school leadership, guided the study and continue to be revisited throughout the research process. By understanding if the use of sexual minority advocacy organizations by inner city schools leads to awareness about sexual minority youth and enhanced advocacy for this population through the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth, researchers can understand the effect of sexual minority youth advocacy organizations on inner city schools.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Using the conceptual framework (Figure 1) as a guide, the purpose of this quantitative research study was to examine the relationship between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations that offer diversity training, inner city school leadership, and personnel that reach out to community organizations for diversity training, and if the diversity training results in the development or advancement of sexual minority youth policy after training has occurred. Community advocates such as GLSEN and HRC offer diversity training and assistance to schools that encourage awareness about sexual minority youth and how to create a safe and supportive environment (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). By working directly with schools, there is a unique opportunity to engage with school leadership and educators about this topic and offer a perspective that advocates specifically for sexual minority youth.

Research by Morrison et al. (2014) showed that many educators are interested in finding ways to help this population but are fearful to ask school leadership about this topic due to anticipating backlash. Additionally, due to lack of diversity training and knowledge, educators report being unable to assist or support sexual minority youth. This study served to enhance understand of how sexual minority youth advocacy organizations engage with inner city schools to provide diversity training that has the potential to assist in improving school environments for sexual minority youth.

The control in this research was diversity training offered by sexual minority youth advocacy organizations that specifically support sexual minority youth in urban schools. Training offered by sexual minority youth advocacy organizations range from creating safe and inviting environments to conducting staff professional development that raises awareness and provides support for sexual minority youth. Additionally, the organizations can assist schools in developing or enhancing policy in schools pertaining to sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). Development of policy can be accomplished using multiple stakeholders including community organizations to work towards more supportive and inclusive school environments (Mallinson, 2016; Robertson & Hill, 2014).

This study attempted to determine the association between the frequency of communication that sexual minority youth advocacy organizations have with inner city school personnel and if this communication results in the request for diversity training, and if after diversity training has occurred whether this positively affects the development of sexual minority youth policy. In this study, a criterion sampling of individuals that are employed or volunteer for sexual minority youth advocacy organizations that offer diversity training to inner city schools participated in a survey to determine the frequency of communication with school personnel to determine if this communication results in diversity training requested by the school. Participants in the survey also answered questions regarding the interest of inner city school personnel in policy development specific to sexual minority youth after the training had occurred. This emphasized how diversity training can raise awareness for the need for inner city schools to develop policy for sexual minority youth.

## Research Questions

Policies and practices set forth by school leadership directly influences an accepting or non-accepting school culture and climate, which in most cases, resides on dominant norms within society transcending to the school environment (Hislop, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2013; Singleton & Linton, 2006). School policies and practices continue to restrict sexual minority youth from such things as an inclusive curriculum, sports, extra-curricular activities, and supporting GSAs (GLSEN, 2016). Payne and Smith (2013) explained that policies and practices are grounded in the gender heteronormative organizational structure that assumes equality, which is not congruent with case studies of sexual minority students. They further argued that the focus for policies and practices should be on the culture and climate instead of defining bullying and harassment in terms of individuals or groups. Organizations in the community are dedicated to specifically addressing sexual minority youth issues in schools and offer support through diversity training and policy development (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018).

The research questions that guided this study were:

Overarching Question: How does school engagement of sexual minority youth advocacy organizations lead to school advocacy for this population?

Research question 1: What is the frequency of interactions between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel and the personnel utilizing the diversity training offered by the organization? The variables include (a) interactions with inner city school personnel and (b) request for diversity training.

Sub question 1: Which personnel at inner city schools do organizations have the most frequent contact with? School personnel is enumerated and includes the principal, vice/assistant

principal, dean, school social worker, psychologist, counselor, school nurse, medical professional, school resource or security officer.

Research question 2: What is the relationship between diversity training and the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth at the school? The variables include (a) diversity training requested and (b) policy development.

H1<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between interactions by organizations with inner city school personnel and diversity training requested by inner city schools.

H2<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between diversity training requested in inner city schools and the development of policy.

Sexual minority youth advocacy organizations such as GLSEN and HRC are established throughout the United States in multiple city areas to provide support to schools (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). The first research question addressed if personnel at inner city school's frequency of communication with external organizations that support sexual minority youth resulted in the request for diversity training in the school, which includes the variables interactions between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel and inner city school diversity training. The frequency of communication between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and inner city school personnel was not known, nor if the frequency of communication is associated with the utilization of sexual minority youth advocacy organizations affects diversity training at the school.

This study examined the interactions between school leadership and other school personnel with sexual minority youth advocacy organization. Leadership in this investigation included administrators in schools, such as principals, and vice/assistant principals, deans, all of which play a critical role in the diversity training that is implemented in schools (Van Wyk &

Pelser, 2014). Leadership shapes the climate and culture and directly affects the comfort of other faculty and staff in addressing sexual minority issues (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). The category of ‘other personnel’ in this study included the roles of school counselor, social worker, school psychologist, nurse, medical professionals, and resource/safety officers. There was also a question about the number of teachers that were supportive of sexual minority youth in the school.

There was no previous understanding in the literature if or to what extent diversity training results in the use of organizations to develop policy in schools for sexual minority youth. In the second research question the researcher sought to determine if there was a relationship between diversity training that occurs in inner city schools and the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth. Organizations such as GLSEN and HRC work with schools and districts to develop policy (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). School leadership can utilize this resource to ensure policy is accurate and dedicated to the improvement of sexual minority youth experiences in schools, but there is nothing that mandates schools use this resource. Determining if the diversity training is associated with policy development specific to sexual minority youth can help organizations and inner city schools best understand the affect that diversity training has on awareness regarding this topic.

## **Hypothesis**

H1<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between the frequency of communication between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel and diversity training requested by the inner city school personnel. Within the critical framework, I discussed the idea that cultural norms and heteronormativity inhibit the awareness surrounding issues sexual minority youth face in schools causing leadership to be unable or unwilling to engage in

partnerships with community organizations that advocate for this population (Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). School leadership personnel can mandate trainings that occur in the school; these individuals have influence over school culture and attitude of a school toward sexual minority youth. There must be an outreach and willingness to engage with an external organization by school leadership to implement a specific training offered to school faculty and staff (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Research has explained that educators often report wanting to advocate for sexual minority youth and will reach out to organizations but fear leadership backlash, which causes silence in this issue reflective of cultural norms (Morrison et al., 2014).

H2<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between diversity training at inner city schools and the development of policy. This aligns to the conceptual framework that discussed the need for policy development that is comprehensive and includes steps to resolve issues (GLSEN, 2016; Lythgoe, 2013). It also aligns to the conceptual framework, which discussed heteronormativity and cultural norms continue to shape school environments and efforts to challenge such norms often fail (Morrison et al., 2014; Robinson & Espilage, 2012). By using organizations that focus directly on sexual minority youth policy development in schools to develop or expand on school policy, this study attempted to determine the extent of which this resource is utilized and if policy development is enhanced by offering diversity trainings. Prior studies have discussed the need for authentic diversity training that would first bring awareness to the issue and then provide deliberate actions to develop and implement policy in schools (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2011; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Morrison et al., 2014). By focusing on diversity training offered by organizations specific to sexual minority youth, this study sought to determine if there is an effect on the development of policy.

## **Research Design**

This quantitative study focused on the frequency of communication between inner city school personnel and sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and if this communication is associated with the request by educators for diversity training. Further, this study determined if there is an association between the diversity training at the school and the development or enhancement of policies and best practices that support sexual minority youth. The variables in this study included: (a) sexual minority youth advocacy organizations frequency of communication with inner city school personnel, (b) request for diversity training, and (c) development or enhancement of policy that supports sexual minority youth.

Using a quantitative correlational design approach allowed for timely feedback using a survey to collect data and to determine if there was a correlation between variables (McMillan, 2012). Using a correlational design for this study determined if there was a relationship between the variables (McMillan, 2012). The relationship between variables is measured to determine if a correlation exists between variables but does not include an independent or dependent variable because they are not manipulated in this type of study (McMillan, 2012). In this study a survey with nominal, ordinal, and interval scale questions was used to gather data that was then analyzed using chi-square analysis to determine relationships among variables. The scales and questions used were identical to a past survey provided by GLSEN and used with permission (2016). A questionnaire was used with a scale that is self-reported and cross-sectional in the sense that the survey is asking questions that require respondents to examine data that captures information from a school year during a specific moment in time.

Longitudinal research is often used to collect data over time and involves more than one questionnaire, whereas cross-sectional research captures information at a single moment in time,

which does create some of the challenges associated with longitudinal studies. The cross-sectional approach is convenient, but there can be limitations including insufficient data return and it does not provide perspective over time (McMillan, 2012).

To determine how inner city schools utilize organizations to engage in diversity training and develop policy for sexual minority youth, a cross-sectional approach was appropriate for this study. Developing policy and practice regarding sexual minority youth is an on-going process that still has not been incorporated in all schools or districts (Freedman et al., 2013; GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). A cross-sectional correlational quantitative approach using a survey to collect data was beneficial to study this issue from the perspective of organizational workers and volunteers that engage with and train inner city schools. This method is timely and captured the information during a specific timeframe that helped understand the extent to which organizations and inner city schools interact regarding sexual minority students.

For the first research question the researcher used survey responses with ordinal scales to associate inner city school personnel engagement with sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and diversity training. Surveying individuals employed or who volunteered for the sexual minority youth advocacy organizations would determine whether there was an association between the frequency of communication with inner city school personnel and diversity training at the school. Research by O'Malley and Capper (2015) used this approach to measure the percentage of enrollment of principals in social justice training offered by a leadership preparation program. GLSEN (2016) researchers determined the frequency of engagement by multiple personnel at the school related to sexual minority issues. This study mirrored the work by past researchers to determine if there is an association among the frequency of

communication between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel and diversity training requested to be implemented at the school.

For the second research question the researcher used survey responses with a nominal scale to correlate between inner city schools that engage in diversity training and the development of sexual minority youth policy for schools. O'Malley and Capper (2015) focused on the percentage of programs that prepare school leadership in the training program to develop policy measured by the development of policy. My study was also designed to determine the association of diversity training and interaction with the sexual minority youth advocacy organizations on the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth by schools. It sought to determine whether sexual minority youth policy development is more likely to occur after diversity training occurred. Research by GLSEN (2016) used quantitative survey methods to determine if policy is present in districts and schools and if the faculty and staff could implement policy to support sexual minority youth. A similar methodology was used to determine if training and interactions with sexual minority youth advocacy organizations affects policy development also using. By using a simple "Yes" and "No" scale, the results indicated how policy affects the school.

Survey protocol offer a way to gather data from many participants and in multiple geographical locations to produce statistical data to test associations between variables (McMillan, 2012). In this study, data analysis results indicated the association between inner city school leadership and the use of diversity training provided by sexual minority youth advocacy organizations. The analysis of data also determined if the diversity training affected the development of policy. By quantifying the frequency of diversity trainings offered, engagement in diversity training by inner city schools, and sexual minority youth policy

development, the results provide an enhanced understanding about how inner city schools engage with sexual minority youth advocacy organizations.

This study explored sexual minority youth advocacy organizations that work in inner city school districts that serve diverse populations in areas such as Baltimore, Md. and Washington D.C. The Baltimore City Public Schools System serves a little over 80 % African American students (BCPS, 2017) and District of Columbia Public Schools reported 64 % (DCPS, n.d.). Many students that are enrolled in these school districts are from low-income families, which also provided a diverse context of school populations for this study (BCPS, 2017; DCPS, n.d.).

Research conducted in the past was generally in suburban areas that served Caucasian populations largely due to convenience and willingness of participation by the population (Marshall & Yarber, 2015; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Other researchers explained that there is difficulty in recruiting participants in many communities due to the sensitivity of the topic (Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Snapp et al., 2015). With the lack of willingness to participate, researchers should be strategic in finding enough participants to engage in the research process. By focusing on inner city schools, I was able to survey employees and volunteers that serve schools in urban settings. These schools serve diverse populations in the areas of race and economic status, this added to the significance of the study. These responded to the survey instrument and provided data on how inner city schools support sexual minority youth and the challenges that limit the advancement of this population. By using this sample population rather than youth or school personnel, it was less likely that participants would be unwilling or fearful to complete the study.

The focus of this study was also on groups that train school personnel within inner city areas to serve and support sexual minority youth. This study examined whether diversity

training affects the development of policy on sexual minority youth. Since the population for this study were adults that work for sexual minority youth advocacy organizations that serve inner city schools, there was limited discomfort for participants with complete anonymity. The data collection protocol did not request any personal information and did not record any identifying information such as email addresses as required by the IRB.

Research by Wilkerson et al. (2016) was a cross-sectional design in which participants completed an anonymous survey associated with an organization dedicated to improving standards for sexual minorities. Bishop and Atlas (2015) discussed that using email is a simple and fast way to gather information, which also gives random data due to the responses being anonymous. By utilizing email, the responses can be achieved effectively and quickly throughout multiple geographical locations. Since the survey in this study was administered to multiple locations throughout the country, the use of email was necessary and convenient.

### **Target Population**

The target population for this study was a convenience sample of individuals that work or volunteer with inner city organizations to improve schools for sexual minority youth. Participants were selected through a sampling method that targeted individuals that work for sexual minority youth advocacy organizations that serve inner city areas. Two organizations of choice for this research included GLSEN and HRC, which have locations throughout the nation and are larger organizations that have many employees and volunteers.

Sexual minority youth advocacy organizations such as GLSEN and HRC offer diversity training to those that are seeking advancements for this population and often work directly with school personnel (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). Accessing this sample population using a digital survey method aimed to increase the number of participants while dedicating efforts to

understanding inner city areas. Marchetti (2015) used the survey method to target populations at the state level advocacy organizations and interest groups. Marchetti (2015) used state lobby registrations and key word searches on a database to develop a list of 700 advocacy organizations in multiple states. The researcher then sent the survey to each organization after speaking with the policy director and getting approval to recruit participants. A reported 204 organizations responded from the developed list (Marchetti, 2015). This amount was appropriate for the type of research and warranted strong conclusions about policy agendas.

Fowler (2014) discussed the importance of a strong sample size, which can be limited by cost and time but is representative of the entire population. I attained an appropriate sample size by determining the desired confidence level and conducting a statistical analysis. With the research target population being directly connected to individuals that work to increase educational equity that supports sexual minority youth, the data source for this study was representative of the target population.

The demographics of the population were focused on inner city area schools that interact with organizations. This did not mean that the participants were from inner city areas but that the schools served were in this specific area. With much of the past research being devoted to suburban areas, there was a need to increase understanding of sexual minority issues in inner city areas (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Additionally, this information enhanced understanding of how more diverse, both in race and socioeconomic status, sexual minority youth are being considered by schools using external organizations such as GLSEN and HRC. Inner city schools such as in Baltimore and Washington DC report higher rates of diverse populations (BCPS, 2017; DCPS, n.d.).

Organizations that are specifically devoted to sexual minority youth were selected from inner city areas across the country. This research included outreach to Albuquerque, Alexandria, Annapolis, Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Central New Jersey, Charlotte, Cincinnati, Collier County, Columbus, Connecticut, Denver, Detroit, Honolulu, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Knoxville, Louisville, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Northeast Ohio, Northern New Jersey, Richmond, Omaha, Orlando, Phoenix, Richmond, San Diego, Southern New Jersey, Springfield, Tampa Bay, Tucson, Washington D.C. Nationally recognized organizations were sampled and included GLSEN and HRC. Past research has made deliberate outreach to specific organizations of interest using email and sampling methods to target more participants (Ferguson & Maccio, 2015; Pastrana Jr., 2014). Research by GLSEN (2016) has been used in much literature and the school climate survey included 11,337 respondents from across the nation. The HRC organization is one of the largest organizations in the nation that works to improve rights for sexual minorities and offers diversity training for schools seeking to improve outcomes for sexual minority youth (HRC, 2018). I contacted the director of each branch for both GLSEN and HRC, via email and phone to begin outreach and gain approval to conduct this study.

To select the designated sample size a power analysis was conducted using the G\*Power technology tool. The G\*Power analysis determines the required sample size for a study that will give a true effect when the research is conducted (Osherson & Lane, n.d.). Using a statistical significance value of 10% ( $p < 0.10$ ) as the value for a type I error to reduce the chance of erroneously rejecting the null hypothesis, I had to have at least 63 participants ( $n = 63$ ) from the criterion-based sample size. The effect size established was 0.35, which is a medium effect size, with a 1- Beta power of .95 error in probability. This sample size was applicable to both research questions.

The sample size is important in this quantitative study, thus the use of specific sampling methods that target the population with organizations that are dedicated to sexual minority youth was beneficial. Fergusson and Maccio (2015) used a sampling method to survey 24 administrative staff and service providers from 19 nonprofit organizations serving sexual minority youth about programs, service gaps, and recommendations for practice, policy, and research. This study was similar to Fergusson and Maccio's (2015) in working to understand how inner city school leadership use sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and if they affect the interest in developing policy and practice that support sexual minority youth.

Craig et al. (2015) evaluated a community-based intervention service provider that provides awareness, knowledge, and skills to professionals. Data was collected using randomly surveyed participants via an electronic link by email for confidentiality and convenience. Using this method of outreach is essential to gaining participants, as it is convenient and confidential.

The initial outreach for this study was to individuals that were listed as immediate contacts as directors of sexual minority youth advocacy organizations to begin the process of applying to conduct outside research. Like the study by Craig et al. (2015), this study included a convenience sample and a confidential survey. Both organizations, GLSEN and HRC, agreed to participate in this study. There were 85 participants, which included employees and volunteers from GLSEN and HRC, that completed the close-ended survey, which was sent via email from the organizations to potential participants located at inner city branches of the organization.

### **Instrumentation**

Discovering how school leadership shapes the school environment for sexual minority youth is an emerging topic after past researchers have shown disparities for this population (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Research by Marchetti (2015) focused on

surveying state-level advocacy organizations to compare representation and agendas devoted to sexual minority issues. Marchetti (2015) collected information on policy agendas and then coded these to determine how each issues effect on the policy agenda. Findings determined that education, time, and money have the best ability to influence policy agendas through this quantitative measure of intersectional representation. The survey for my study followed a similar pattern of comparing the frequency of contact with external organizations to the interest in development or enhancement of policy, which required contacting each organization.

Using contacts within inner city organizations, the survey for this study used an outreach method like the research by Marchetti (2015) but did not use a coding method and instead relied on correlational statistics. In this study the researcher also began outreach to sexual minority youth advocacy organizations first to contact research directors at the organizations to determine willingness to participate in the study.

An evaluation of community-based intervention services to sexual minority youth was conducted by Craig et al. (2015) to determine if intervention services affect knowledge and awareness. Using a random sample of 2,850 participants, a quantitative post-test was administered after participants completed a training. The study used a regression analysis to evaluate how educational interventions can enhance confidence and cultural competence when working with sexual minority youth. Using a similar instrument to evaluate community-based members was useful in my study. To enhance the data collection, a more diverse participant sample was, which was a primary goal of the research with inner city schools, which generally serve racially and economically diverse groups. Further, this study mimicked Craig et al. (2015) by using participants that were familiar with sexual minority youth issues but focused on the

frequency of interactions with various school personnel and whether this interaction led to policy development.

A mixed-method study by O'Malley and Capper (2015) used a Likert-like scale instrument to survey 2,955 full time faculty members, graduate students, and practitioners about leadership preparation for sexual minority youth issues. A web-based survey was sent to 82 universities, which increased participation and diversity. The survey provided a snapshot at a specific time of perspectives in principal preparation programs by faculty and staff at various universities. This was a useful instrument for my study, which utilized the same method to survey participants from various sexual minority youth inner city organizations via an email link that was web-based. Using the ordinal, nominal, interval, Likert-like scale, and valid past research questions helped in determining the relationship between the variables of leadership and school personnel, inner city organizations, and policy development. Similarly, GLSEN (2016) used frequency scales and a dichotomous scale to determine faculty and staff engagement with sexual minority youth issues and the development or implementation of policy regarding this topic.

The survey used in this study was adapted from the GLSEN (2016) National School Climate Survey and was used with permission from the organization. Questions were eliminated based on the research questions for this study and variables being measured so that only specific questions that addressed school climate and culture as it relates to sexual minority youth were used. These questions were also adapted to address the population of study, which were the employees and volunteers for organizations like GLSEN and HRC that specifically work with inner city schools, whereas the NSCS survey by GLSEN (2016) was targeting students in

schools. Using the questions that have been in multiple research studies and proven valid was important in this study to gather data that was sound and reliable.

Fowler explained that survey questions should be tested via a pilot study and then used for research. By using already substantiated survey questions, the researcher can be confident the questions are established (Fowler, 2014; Sauro, 2016). Adjusting the language to address the population of interest does not change the meaning or information the research seeks to obtain. Survey questions are still valid despite minor changes to the questions to improve clarity for participants since the target population is different (Sauro, 2016). The same frequency measures were identical to the survey, as these measures have proven to be valid in past research conducted by GLSEN (GLSEN, 2018).

The survey used for this study is found in Appendix A. General demographic information collected was brief and included the region of the country. This ensured the anonymity of participants, but also allowed for future research to expand on the findings and develop more of an understanding about the diversity of organization personnel.

Questions and response scales on the survey were developed directly from a previous survey provided by GLSEN (2016) and were used with permission. Each question was specific to the research variables and had been valid in past research by GLSEN. Similarly, the same choice responses were used for respondents as the GLSEN survey. By using survey questions that have been piloted and used annually, the reliability of the study is increased (Johnson & Christensen, 2007). Participants in this study were asked to agree to be involved in this study by providing consent information at the beginning of the survey. The consent information explained that by clicking the arrow at the bottom of the page to begin the survey indicated

participants' agreement to participate in the study. This also informed participants that they were able to stop the study at any time with no penalty and that no rewards or incentives are provided.

The survey began by asking general demographic information that included the general geographical location that the participant's organization was located. This was not used to discriminate against participants but to document the geographical diversity of sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and schools. This study focused on inner city areas with a direct intent to increase a representation of the diversity of students served by the organization and to gain insight to how inner city schools are utilizing organizations as a resource. Details about the participants' demographics were not included in this study to protect survey respondent identities. The Concordia University Institutional Review Board was strongly against collecting any additional demographic information citing that demographic information would allow for participants to be easily identified. Participants were then asked to complete a brief survey using questions that addressed the research questions quantitatively.

The first research question determined if there was a relationship between the frequency of communication between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations, specifically GLSEN and HRC, with school personnel and the request for diversity training. On the survey, the second question asked participants during the past school year how frequently a positive or helpful conversation with personnel at school occurred. School personnel included principal, vice/assistant principal, dean, counselor, social worker, psychologist, nurse, medical professional, safety, resource officer.

The choice responses used were from the same scale used on the GLSEN (2016) survey and included the following options: "never," "once," "a few times," and "many times." This addressed the first research question labeled "1a," which was established to determine what

personnel at schools' organizations have the most frequent contact with. This was accomplished by examining the variables of types of personnel at the school and the frequency of contact each type or personnel has with sexual minority youth advocacy organizations.

The third question on the survey also addressed the first research question by examining how frequently schools request diversity training by sexual minority youth advocacy organizations. Scale responses were "never," "rarely," "sometimes," "often," and "very often." By using this question, data analysis was able to provide the frequency that schools seek to implement diversity training. The fourth question asked specifically about the support of leadership in the schools, which included the principal and the vice or assistant principal or dean in relation to support of sexual minority youth. Using the GLSEN (2016) survey, the scale responses included "very supportive," "somewhat supportive," "neutral," "somewhat unsupportive," and "very unsupportive." This question helped better understand of how leadership in schools interacts with organizations to work in support of sexual minority youth.

Teachers and other staff are also important personnel at schools that can reach out to organizations as well (Payne & Smith, 2013). Question five of the survey specifically addressed teacher personnel by asking for the approximate number of teachers and staff other than leadership that are supportive of sexual minority youth as interpreted by the organizational interactions. The scale included "none," "1," "between 2 and 5," "between 6 and 10," and "more than 10." Both questions three and four helped determine which school personnel are seeking support from organizations and the variance between leadership and other school staff, including teachers. By examining these factors, the first research question, as well as the sub-question, were analyzed and examined.

Using the conceptual framework as a guide, the second research question was developed to determine a relationship between the use of diversity training and the development of policy specifically for sexual minority youth. Question six of the survey was used to determine if the schools served already have a policy about bullying and harassment established but not necessarily with the inclusion of sexual minority youth. This was a “yes” or “no” response. Many schools do have a policy that protects students from bullying and harassment but frequently does not specifically address sexual minority youth (Payne & Smith, 2013; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). It was important to determine whether there is an interest by schools to develop policy that supports sexual minority youth in schools that interact with the organizations and if the implementation of training influences this interest. Question seven on the survey asked if the schools demonstrate an interest in developing or improving policy to support sexual minority youth. These questions collected data that would help determine a relationship between the variables of diversity training and policy development.

The last question on the survey asked if there is a statewide policy where the school is located that supports sexual minority youth but not necessarily specific to schools or education. According to the critical framework, states that have a policy established have overall support and resources (McNeill, 2013; Taylor et al, 2012). With more support and resources, schools and personnel are more inclined to recognize there is an issue, but schools are not required to implement the policy, rather it is suggested (Higgins, 2016; McNeill, 2013). This question can be used in the future to determine if the statewide policy affects school interest in sexual minority youth issues and ultimately the development or improvement of policy. Future research can expand on this topic and address how state policy influences inner city schools.

## **Data Collection**

Data was collected through a digital survey targeting sexual minority youth advocacy organizations that directly work to improve the lives of sexual minority youth in urban areas. To gauge the interactions of organizations with inner city school leaders and personnel, a scale response process was used. This researcher extended the invitation to participants from multiple organizations that serve inner city schools throughout the United States. The primary organizations of choice were GLSEN and HRC due to their extensive operations in inner-cities throughout the nation. Both organizations offer training and assistance to schools regarding sexual minority youth and are prominently known by school staff as being experts on the topic (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). Other organizations that serve sexual minority youth in inner city schools were also invited to participate and included Gender Spectrum, GLSEN, GSA Network, HRC, It Gets Better Project, Lambda Legal, Parents and Families of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), and The Trevor Project.

Confirmation occurred from GLSEN and HRC, and there was communication with Gender Spectrum, Lambda Legal, and PFLAG. GLSEN and HRC are used as participants in this research due to both accepting the formal application for external research and confirming the distribution. This was a multi-site collection of data that included outreach to Albuquerque, Alexandria, Annapolis, Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Central New Jersey, Charlotte, Cincinnati, Collier County, Columbus, Connecticut, Denver, Detroit, Honolulu, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Knoxville, Louisville, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Northeast Ohio, Northern New Jersey, Richmond, Omaha, Orlando, Phoenix, Richmond, San Diego, Southern New Jersey, Springfield, Tampa Bay, Tucson, Washington D.C. After permission was granted from the organizations, the research director at the organization was sent an email with the survey link to

send to employees and volunteers. This allowed for the survey to be completely anonymous and this researcher to be unaware of any identifying information such as personal email addresses.

The first research question in this study determined which personnel within inner city schools most frequently engage with sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and if diversity training is utilized by inner city schools. The focus of this research remained on diversity training offered to faculty and staff in inner city schools and how often it was used or requested by personnel. O'Malley and Capper (2015) used a web-based survey through email with a link to determine the participation of school leadership in social justice programs aimed to improve principal effectiveness in addressing social justice issues. The survey by GLSEN (2016) used an email-based link for participants to complete questions on faculty and staff in the school. This study mirrored the data collection of O'Malley and Capper and GLSEN by using email as the distribution mechanism. The survey was convenient and used scale responses. The results indicated that engagement between sexual minority youth advocacy organization and inner city school leadership was associated with the request for diversity training.

The second research question investigated if after diversity training for inner city schools' personnel has been offered additional outreach to organizations to develop policy for sexual minority youth students. Using the survey method developed by previous questions (GLSEN, 2016), participants could answer questions pertaining to the frequency of outreach about developing policy after diversity trainings have occurred. Marchetti (2015) surveyed over 200 state advocacy groups to determine policy agenda diversity through quantitative methodology. The research was similar in using email for data collection through a link and determining the development of policy. The author used a least squares regression analysis to determine correlation between variables with a sample population of 204. Using the data, Marchetti

determined the relationship between policy agendas and representation of policy that is devoted to minority issues.

O'Malley and Capper (2015) surveyed participants via email to examine how sexual minority issues were integrated into a principal social justice program. The survey collected data from faculty and graduate students through a survey distributed through email. This was convenient by taking minimal time and could reach a diverse group of individuals.

In this study the questions for both research topics were developed from past research that was substantial and valid for data collection. Using previous questions from the annual GLSEN survey was the primary source of questions that were developed with permission (GLSEN, 2016). Studies by O'Malley and Caper (2015), AERA (2010), and Marchetti (2015) also used associated questions for quantitative studies that were examined but not used for this study. Data was collected via email with a link to the survey and distributed by the organization, which was different from past research in which the researcher distributed the survey. This allowed for participants to be geographically diverse and able to answer the survey questions quickly and conveniently, while maintaining anonymity.

Using the program Qualtrics, the collection of data was timely, and the responses were in real-time allowing for the results to be viewed as participants completed the surveys. Collection was unlimited and cost effective in addition to being easily established through a template.

This study did not include the names of specific schools or individuals involved, so there was minimal risk in the data collection process, which was explained to participants at the beginning of the survey helping to increase participation as discussed by previous research (Freedman et al., 2013). Participation in the survey remained anonymous, and by using email,

participants could share the link to other individuals that work for sexual minority youth advocacy organizations that serve inner city schools.

Collection of data occurred during the specific timeframe from February to May 2018. Reminders were sent via email to recruit more survey respondents, and GLSEN sent the survey link in two formats. The collection of data was monitored regularly, and reminders were sent to the organizations to resend the survey link when there was a noticeable decrease in the number of responses.

### **Operationalization of Variables**

Variables in this study included frequency of interactions between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel including leadership, diversity training requested by inner city schools that focus on the advancement of sexual minority youth, and school policy specific to sexual minority youth. Organizations that support sexual minority youth and engage with school personnel and leadership were the independent variable in the first research question. Independent variables were manipulated or changed during the research process and were assumed to influence the dependent variable (McLeod, 2008).

The study questioned the frequency of interactions with school personnel compared to the diversity trainings requested by the inner city schools. Monitoring the frequency of interactions between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and school personnel at inner city areas can differ by location and by specific organization. The range was based on previous research that focused on finding frequency of implementation. It categorized how often diversity training was requested by inner city schools. Bishop and Atlas (2015) surveyed 116 individuals online to understand how the frequency of implementing policy affects sexual minority issues. This

allowed for the authors to determine a range of implementation as the independent variable. In this study, the frequency of engagement suggested the ability to conduct diversity training.

Diversity training requested by inner city schools through the organizations was the dependent variable addressed in the first research question. The hypothesis of no relationship between diversity training offered and inner city schools that engage in diversity training. Organizations such as GLSEN and HRC track schools that participate in diversity trainings and can report quantitative data about this topic (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). It was important to understand whether engagement with a school affects the request for diversity training.

In this study, leadership at schools included principals, vice/assistant principals, and deans. Although teachers or other school personnel can suggest the training, it is ultimately the leadership in the school that makes the decision (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Leadership in this study did not include teachers, support staff, counselors, or office staff.

Research conducted by GLSEN (2016) often clarified questions to create more specificity on the survey administered to students throughout the United States. Using this same approach, the questions in this study included the type of personnel and what personnel are and are not part of the school leadership. This helped establish validity of the variable by being clear and concise when asking questions via the survey method (Adams & Lawrence, 2014).

Diversity training and policy were the variables in the second research topic. This research question was developed to determine whether there is a relationship between diversity training requested by inner city schools and the development or enhancement of policies and practices that aim to support sexual minority youth. Diversity training was one variable in this research question and was specified as in the first research question to include outreach by inner city schools for implementation.

The other variable in the second research topic was the development of policy and practices that support sexual minority youth as requested by the inner city schools to the organization that engages in diversity training. Bishop and Atlas (2015) researched the relationship between policy and sexual minority youth issues by surveying school psychologists through email. Using an anonymous survey and correlational analysis, the authors determined schools are not proactive in understanding and implementing sexual minority youth policy and that there is a disconnect between perspectives of policy and practice. The second research question expanded on this topic to determine if there was an association between diversity training and development of policy at schools located in inner city areas.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis protocol was developed from past studies that used similar surveys such as GLSEN (2016), O'Malley and Capper (2015), and Marchetti (2015). In this study, individuals that were employed or volunteered for the sexual minority youth advocacy organizations that served inner city schools completed the survey ( $n = 85$ ). The survey extended across the United States to multiple inner city areas to better understand the past school year engagement of well-established organizations with inner city schools. Respondents answered survey questions to determine the frequency of engagement with inner city schools and if there is diversity training requested and whether this led to policy development specific to sexual minority youth. Responses were tracked using the Qualtrics system.

The first research question included sexual minority youth advocacy organizations frequency of communication with inner city school personnel and the request for diversity training. Randomly sampled individuals that were employed or volunteered for the organizations GLSEN and HRC completed the survey anonymously to rate interactions with

inner city school leadership and personnel and the request for diversity training and support pertaining to sexual minority youth using chi-square analysis to determine an association between the variables. The same population answered survey questions pertaining to the variables of diversity training and policy development. This determined if after diversity training, regardless of how frequent, there is an outreach by inner city schools to sexual minority youth advocacy organizations to develop policy specific to sexual minority youth. This used a frequency and dichotomous scale to determine the correlation among variables through statistical analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using the statistical analysis software called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v25) to determine if there is a correlation between variables for each research question (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). Using the SPSS technology, the correlational statistics was determined for both research questions to decide the frequency of interactions using a random criterion sample of individuals that were employed or volunteered for sexual minority youth advocacy organizations that serve inner city schools. The authors discussed first finding the relationship between variables with the relationship determined by using a correlation coefficient calculator and creating an ordinal scale of agreement based on the survey responses. This determined a correlation between inner city schools utilizing sexual minority youth advocacy organizations for diversity training and if diversity training predicts the outreach to develop policy specific to sexual minority youth.

Each question in the Adams and Lawrence (2014) included a frequency scale or dichotomous scale to allow for ease of determining responses and categorizing them. The number and type of responses were recorded using the Qualtrics technology, which tracked the responses as participants took the survey. Answers based on the scale determined if there was

first a correlation between frequency of communication by sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel and the request for diversity training. This was established through survey questions that included the frequency of contact with school personnel and diversity training requested to determine the correlation. A second correlation between diversity training and interest in the development of sexual minority youth policy in the school was determined using the frequency data collected through a question that included both variables.

Craig et al. (2015) used a similar statistical analysis to determine a link between variables. Missing data was not included in the analysis. The data included frequencies of responses to determine the correlation through a logistical method including sexual minority youth served and community-based intervention programs. This study used similar methodology of past researchers to determine a correlation between the variables, frequency of communication with inner city school personnel, diversity training, and policy development specific to sexual minority youth.

Working with the data to determine a correlation between variables was on-going as participants were entering responses. The first research question examined the correlation between two variables that include sexual minority youth advocacy organizations' frequency of contact with school personnel and the frequency of outreach to these organizations by inner city school personnel to request diversity training. Using the Qualtrics technology and statistical analysis, the data was efficiently analyzed. Similarly, the second research question used two variables that included diversity training and the development of policy, so statistical analysis was used to determine a correlation. For both research questions in this study a chi-square statistical analysis was used to determine a relationship between variables. Prior research

included some variety of statistical analysis, including the chi-square analysis, through a developed program such as SPSS. Working with the data through the statistical analysis program allows for strong validity and limited researcher bias (McMillan, 2012).

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Assumptions**

Reporting the limitations and delimitations was necessary for this study. Using quantitative methodology enabled me to determine if the correlation between variables exists but was a restriction in determining details of personal responses about the topic. This boundary was necessary to begin the research on this topic in determining if inner city schools utilize sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and if it results in additional outreach to develop policy. Determining a correlation between variables was a useful method to understand the research questions but was bound by limitations (Adams & Lawrence, 2014).

Another limitation included the scope of the geographic regions represented in the study (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). While the study targeted inner-cities throughout the United States most of the participants were from the Northeast geographic region. Both organizations have branches located in inner-cities in all regions of the United States, but the headquarters are in the Northeast region.

An additional limitation in this study was that the sample population was bound by selecting specific responses in the survey regarding the frequency of interactions with inner city school leadership and personnel requests for diversity training and policy development specific to sexual minority youth. Using a Likert-like frequency scale method has proved to be useful and valid for many studies; however, participants are bound to selected responses that can be subjective (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). The findings improved understanding of the interactions

between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and inner city schools and helped give insight to the affect diversity training has in policy development.

Sampling was one example of a delimitation that was deliberately in place by the researcher. Using a sampling method by outreach to large sexual minority youth advocacy organizations that serve inner city areas was critical in gaining the appropriate number of responses; however, it limited the ability to collect data from a random population that was less biased. Pastrana (2014) conducted research using a similar sampling method to gather data on family support as it relates to outness levels of African American sexual minority youth. The research by Pastrana (2014) explained this as a delimitation, explaining that the population being sampled had biases that could result from past experiences or increased knowledge regarding sexual minority youth because there is a sincere interest in the topic.

Using participants from various sexual minority youth advocacy organizations throughout the United States in specific inner-cities was a delimitation. There was a deliberate focus on inner city areas due to lack of past research that specifically targeted this geographical area. Past researchers have suggested expanding research to include inner city areas, and it is important to gain the perspective of inner city areas to better generalize findings (Payne & Smith, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Although this study was a positive direction in the development of sexual minority youth research due to the focus on inner city areas, there is still the need to expand and include more cities and geographical locations.

This study used convenience-based sampling method to gather an increased number of respondents that had an interest and direct connection to diversity training to improve outcomes for sexual minority youth. This delimitation was mentioned throughout past research (Morrison et al., 2014; Pastrana, 2014; Robinson & Espelage, 2012) and coincides with the developed

conceptual framework that explains that individuals can be hesitant to discuss the topic of sexual minority youth due to sensitivity, discomfort, or fear of repercussions (Morrison et al., 2014; Pastrana, 2014).

The primary organizations of interest in this study were GLSEN and HRC. These organizations focus strongly on advancements for sexual minority youth, but there are other advocacy organizations that also offer support to schools for this population. This study used the sexual minority youth advocacy organizations GLSEN and HRC due to their size, structure, and convenience to the researcher. There are other similar organizations to GLSEN and HRC, but they did not agree to participate in this study. Researching this topic and conducting more surveys to include other organizations that work to enhance educational outcomes for sexual minority youth successfully will increase the validity of findings.

### **Internal and External Validity**

Working to determine a relationship between variables in research required reliability and validity through consistency and clear methodology. Evaluating sexual minority youth advocacy organizations, inner city school leadership and personnel, and policy was based on past research that was valid and used similar methodology. Using the quantitative methodology with a frequency scale allowed for this to be limited, thus increasing validity and accuracy of findings. The frequency scale that used ordinal and nominal variations was an effective method to gather survey data that determined the relationship among variables, but there also can be measurement errors due to subjective responses that affect the validity of the research. Biases from participants can affect responses as can the interpretation of the study by the researcher (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). Establishing clear and descriptive survey questions that were utilized past valid research increased the validity of the study (McMillan, 2012).

Campbell and Stanley (1963) discussed that events that occur during the research can impact internal validity and in this study the survey was sent on multiple occasions by the organizations to potential participants. The dates and times that the survey was sent by the organizations were random and the survey was re-sent out when it was noticeable by the researcher that participation decreased. This did not include any specific dates for the survey to be sent, which could have impacted participation. There is a threat to the internal validity due to the history of events that occurred during the survey process.

Changes in the instrumentation can also affect the internal validity of the study (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). In this study, for the chi-square analysis to be conducted, many of the response selections had to be collapsed so that all categories in the chi-square analysis could be calculated. For example, the frequency of contact with principals, vice/assistant principals, deans, social workers, counselors, psychologists, the options never and once were collapsed into one category. This was a change in the measurement that had to be made for the chi-square analysis but did impact the internal validity.

This study examined an association between variables using a single measurement of frequency. Using quantitative analysis with ordinal and interval scales increased the internal validity to ensure the same comparison occurred for each participant and limited bias by responses. Construct bias can occur when there are two different meanings for groups that are involved in the research (McMillan, 2012). Using the quantitative frequency scale analysis that examined the correlation of one factor helped eliminate this type of bias. Each research question in this study included the examination of the correlation between two variables through a frequency test using the valid frequency scales obtained with permission from the research

conducted by GLSEN (2016). Limiting the threats to the internal validity decreased construct bias allowing for more sound research.

By using correlation of data, the results were examined to confidently draw a conclusion about the study population. Aldred (2014) explained that statistical analysis determines the relationship among variables by testing the null hypotheses. Using an outreach method to recruit participants creates bias when examining the topic of sexual minority youth because only specific participants responded, those that have knowledge and understanding on the topic (AERA, 2010). By using the frequency scale that includes ordinal and interval values, this personal bias was lessened and allowed for more sound data collection to accept or reject the null hypothesis (McMillan, 2012).

Pearson's chi-square analysis is a statistical test that determines if there is an association among the variables (Lowry, 2015). If there is an association among the variables, the null hypothesis is rejected, whereas if there is not an association among the variables the null hypothesis is accepted (Aldred, 2014; Lowry, 2015). A null hypothesis was established for both research questions in this study and the null hypothesis asserted there is no relationship between the variables. Generally, a standard significance threshold of 0.05 or 0.01 ( $p < .05$  or  $p < .01$ ) is used, which is the value to except or reject the null hypothesis. In this study, the significant threshold was .05 and a  $p$  value was calculated based on the data. If this value was larger than the significance threshold, the null hypothesis could not be rejected, but if the calculated value was smaller than the significance threshold, the null hypothesis could be rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis (Aldred, 2014). By using these well-established factors, the criterion-related validity of the research was strong. The G\*Power analysis was conducted to determine the sample size, which also limits criterion-related validity concerns.

## **Expected Findings**

Using the conceptual framework as a guide, the expected findings were developed. Dinkins and Englert (2015) explained school culture and climate are shaped by policies that are grounded in the theory of heteronormativity. Due to heteronormativity, sexual minority youth students are not supported by the school environment, which requires faculty and staff to be trained on this issue. The first research question examined the frequency of engagement between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school leadership and personnel and if engagement resulted in a request for diversity training. According to the null hypothesis for the research question being examined, there is no relationship between variables, which includes engagement with community organizations and diversity training in inner city schools. Heteronormativity asserts that there are many issues that perpetuate socially constructed ideas of sexual minority youth limiting advancement and outreach to support this population (Ciszek, 2014). Here, I anticipated that there would be no association between engagement between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel and the request for diversity training by the school.

The second research question examined the diversity training that is utilized by inner city schools and the interest in policy development. Anticipated results from the research supported the null hypothesis that there would be no relationship between the variables diversity training and policy development specific to sexual minority youth. Robinson and Espelage (2012) discussed that there is a lack of effective sexual minority youth policies and procedures. Diversity training is suggested in the research to increase awareness, but this does not necessarily result in challenging dominant cultural norms by developing policy specific to sexual minority youth (Cizek, 2014). Even when diversity training does occur, there is still a fear to support

sexual minority youth due to repercussions from the immediate community or lack of focus on sexual minority youth experiences that challenge cultural norms suggesting no association between variables that include diversity training and sexual minority youth policy development (O'Malley & Capper, 2015; Walker & Bates, 2016).

### **Ethical Issues**

This quantitative research considered ethical issues particularly due to the sensitivity of the topic. Ethical issues were limited due to the minimal risk to participants and limited researcher bias. This study was conducted using a survey method that was anonymous and did not identify specific schools or individuals. Limited demographic information was collected to protect survey respondents. Personal and professional email addresses were protected because they were not recorded when the participants engaged in the survey, nor did I email prospective participants; the organizations sent the invitation email and link to them.

The organizations that agreed to participate in this study directly sent out the email invitation to potential participants for this study. This quantitative study used statistical analysis that assured the anonymity of the participants. Participants included individuals who engage with or can engage with inner city schools to provide diversity training and support through sexual minority youth advocacy organizations. The research was specific to inner city schools throughout the United States but had no identification process through the survey to ensure complete privacy. Minimal risk to identification was present, and the information gathered was throughout the United States, so it was both large and diverse.

The expected findings indicated that there would be no relationship between variables, which support the conceptual framework developed by examining past research. By examining the need to not only to develop awareness about sexual minority youth, but also to engage in

conversations that challenge cultural norms and the theory of heteronormativity to deliver equitable outcomes through policy for this population, thus increasing ethical standards in inner city schools, is essential to ensuring safe and supportive school environments. Ethical consideration for this study was imperative and maintained to ensure the results were fair and accurate while limiting bias (Adams & Lawrence, 2014).

Using the quantitative methodology by an anonymous survey helped limit researcher bias, which can challenge the ethics of the study (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). By using a statistical measurement, the data was examined with minimal risk to bias. The ethical considerations for this study limited risks and bias to support the results from the research.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the frequency that inner city school leadership and personnel communicate with sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and whether this engagement affects the request for diversity training and policy development specific to sexual minority youth. Data was gathered from individuals who were either employed or volunteered for sexual minority youth advocacy organizations that work with inner city schools. The organizations that agreed to participate in the study included GLSEN and HRC, although contact was made with other established organizations as well.

This study used a survey instrument that examined the frequency to determine if there is an association between variables. Using G\*Power analysis to determine the required number of number of participants to increase validity in the analysis. Ethical considerations were important, and I designed this study to for minimal risks to participants by maintaining anonymity and using no students in the research. Past research is limited because it has occurred primarily in suburban areas. This study expanded on past research by collecting data from sexual minority

youth advocate organizations that served inner city areas, which is an important perspective to gain so that improvements for this population can continue.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative correlational research study was to determine whether interactions between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and inner city schools result in diversity training and if training results in the development of policy to support sexual minority youth. A survey was disseminated through the Qualtrics Application system to gather data from sexual minority youth advocacy organization employees and volunteers on their service and engagement of inner city schools. The survey instrument used questions from a prior research instrumentation developed by the GLSEN (2016) school climate survey with permission. The survey by GLSEN (2016) is an annual survey that was used several times prior to use in this study. The survey in this study was distributed via email, which is the same method that GLSEN used, this made it convenient for participants to respond to the survey. For internal reliability, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated at .750, which is an acceptable value for the internal reliability (Muijs, 2011; Vogt, 2007).

Data collection for this study occurred via an email link that was sent out by participating organizations directly to their employees and volunteers. Each organization sent the email link to the employees and volunteers along with an explanation of the research and consent information. Eighty-five employees and volunteers of GLSEN and HRC across the United States completed the survey.

Data analysis included Pearson's chi-square test to determine the significance between variables. This method was chosen because it effectively examined the data between two categorical variables for each research question, and it was the analysis protocol used in the original research from which the survey questions and responses were drawn (GLSEN, 2016).

**Research questions.** The following questions were developed for this study:

Overarching Question: How does school engagement of sexual minority youth advocacy organizations lead to school advocacy for this population?

Research question 1: What is the frequency of interactions between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel and the personnel utilizing the diversity training offered by the organization? The variables include (a) interactions with inner city school personnel and (b) request for diversity training.

Sub question 1: Which personnel at inner city schools do organizations have the most frequent contact with? School personnel is enumerated and includes the principal, vice/assistant principal, dean, school social worker, psychologist, counselor, school nurse, medical professional, school resource or security officer.

Research question 2: What is the relationship between diversity training and the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth at the school? The variables include (a) diversity training requested and (b) policy development.

**Hypothesis.** H1<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between interactions by organizations with inner city school personnel and diversity training requested by inner city schools.

H2<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between diversity training requested in inner city schools and the development of policy.

Several delimitations were associated with the study. Data was collected from organizations that work with inner city schools in the United States. This was purposefully done to answer the research questions, which focused specifically on inner city school interactions with sexual minority youth advocacy organizations. Additionally, there are several organizations that offer training and support to schools on sexual minority youth issues. This research used the

organizations GLSEN and HRC, as both are among the largest and well-respected organizations throughout the United States that work with schools to improve the environment for sexual minority youth. These organizations were also ideal because of their size and willingness to send out the survey to employees and volunteers of the organizations. This chapter discusses the data analysis and results of the study, and includes a description of the sample, summary of the results, and a detailed analysis of the findings.

### **Description of the Sample**

Participants were a criterion sample of individuals that worked or volunteered for the organizations GLSEN and HRC at the time of the survey dissemination, which support inner city schools in improving campus environments for sexual minority youth. Although outreach to multiple organizations occurred, GLSEN and HRC were the two organizations that responded and agreed to distribute the survey. Distribution to the different chapters of the organization included the locations of Albuquerque, Alexandria, Annapolis, Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Central New Jersey, Charlotte, Cincinnati, Collier County, Columbus, Connecticut, Denver, Detroit, Honolulu, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Knoxville, Louisville, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Northeast Ohio, Northern New Jersey, Richmond, Omaha, Orlando, Phoenix, Richmond, San Diego, Southern New Jersey, Springfield, Tampa Bay, Tucson, Washington D.C. There were 85 respondents across these geographical regions.

A G\*Power analysis determined 63 responses were required and included a  $p = 0.10$ , an effect size of 0.35 and a 1-Beta power of .95 for the calculation. Using more responses than required by the G\*Power analysis was warranted because a larger sample size would affect the confidence of the study (Osherson & Lane, n.d.). After using a sample-size calculator, the number of participants required was 69 for a population of 240 employee and volunteers across

both organizations, with a 95% confidence level, and a confidence interval of 10 (Creative Research Systems, 2012). The total number of completed surveys by participants and used for analysis in this study was 85.

The geographical data, including variables and numbers, were entered into the Qualtrics system. This was a nominal scale, which was categorized and had the lowest level of measurement, which is common for demographics such as geographical location (Osherson & Lane, n.d.). The geographical question was used to determine the general region where the survey was taken. Survey respondents were largely from the Northeast region, but also included the Southeast, Midwest, and Southwest. Given the approximate Global Positioning System location from the survey system, the urban areas included Charlotte, NC; Miami, FL; Baltimore, MD; Philadelphia, PA; New York, NY; Indianapolis, IN; and areas throughout New Jersey, Washington D.C., and Hawaii. Table 1 shows the percentages of the general locations.

Table 1

*General Geographical Locations of Participants*

Region	Percentage
Northeast	90.6
Southeast	5.9
Midwest	1.2
Northwest	0
Southwest	2.4

There were four participants that appeared to open the survey by clicking the link but did not answer any questions. The information about the study and the link were sent via email by the organizations to employees and volunteers of their organization in cities throughout the

United States. Upon opening the survey link, the system recorded the survey as in progress and deleted the responses if not submitted within several days. All completed surveys were considered viable and included in the data analysis.

The data response rate included  $n = 85$  participants from a population of  $N = 240$  employees and volunteers for GLSEN and HRC (GLSEN, 2018, HRC, 2018). The response of 85 participants represented a response rate of 35.4%. Responses were considered viable if the survey was completed and submitted; if it met these criteria, the data was used in the statistical analysis. Response rate can be impacted by a variety of factors (McMillan, 2012; Vogt, 2007). Past researchers have reported participation being low when conducting sexual minority youth research (Ciszek, 2014; Freedman et al., 2013; Pfeffer, 2012; Snapp et al., 2015). Identifying possible participants for research on the topic of sexual minority youth can impact the response rate (Ciszek, 2014; Freedman et al., 2013; Pfeffer, 2012; Snapp et al., 2015). Past research indicates challenges in recruiting participants. The focus of this study was on adults that frequently engage in conversations on the topic of sexual minority youth to increase the response rate. Despite recruiting adults, the topic of sexual minority youth can still impact participation due to the sensitivity of the topic.

This study did not offer incentives to survey respondents. Incentives are sometimes used in research to gain participation, but this usually requires funding (McMillan, 2012). Additionally, there are often other external surveys sent to sexual minority youth advocacy organizations, which can be time consuming and redundant. Data collection was strategically deployed by using the organizations to send the survey rather than the researcher; I did this to not only maintain anonymity but to gain more participants. By using staff that work at the central location for the sexual minority youth advocacy organizations to disseminate the survey, I

believed participants would be familiar with the individual sending the survey and could recognize the email being internal; thus, more likely to respond. If I had sent the survey it would be an email address that was unrecognized and might have been possibly discarded. The survey is shown in Appendix A and the Qualtrics data is included in Appendix B.

### **Summary of the Results**

The first research question in this study determined if the frequency of engagement between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel resulted in diversity training in the school. The survey used choice responses that asked the positive or helpful engagement opportunities the organizations had on average with inner city school leadership and personnel and how frequently diversity training was requested by inner city schools. A survey question enumerated school personnel asking participants to rate the frequency of engagement with each type of staff member. Another question asked specifically how frequently diversity training was requested. O'Malley and Capper (2015) used a web-based survey sent through an email with a link to collect data on the participation of school leadership in social justice programs aimed to improve principal effectiveness in addressing social justice issues. Examination of the data included frequencies and percentages from the scaled responses and cross-tab comparative analysis. This study followed a similar pattern in collection and analysis as the study by O'Malley and Capper (2015).

The survey by GLSEN (2016) also used an email-based link for participants to complete questions. Some of the questions asked about the frequency of communication between faculty and staff with sexual minority youth advocacy organizations. It also included an examination of offerings and resources that support sexual minority youth by the schools. Each of these analyses included a frequency chart that compared sub-group correlations. These methods were

an effective way to analyze the data for this research question as it mirrors the work by GLSEN (2016) and O'Malley and Capper (2015) for the first research question.

The second research question examined diversity training requested and interest in policy development. Bishop and Atlas (2015) researched the relationship between policy and sexual minority youth issues by surveying school psychologists through email. Using an anonymous survey, the researchers determined schools are not proactive in understanding and implementing sexual minority youth policy through correlational statistics and that there is a disconnect between perspectives of policy and practice (Bishop & Atlas, 2015). The second research question in this study expanded on this topic to determine if there was a correlation or disconnection between diversity training and development of policy. Measuring the variables using a chi-square analysis determined if there was a relationship. GLSEN (2016) used a similar method to determine a correlation between policy and the inclusion of sexual minority youth students. This is an effective method when there are variables that are categorical, which is why a chi-square analysis was chosen for this study. Mirroring the work by GLSEN (2016) and other credible past research was used to develop and implement this study.

The survey was closed in May 2018 after the desired number of responses were recorded and all methods to gain participants were exhausted. A data report was developed from the Qualtrics system, which provided an overview of the responses from the participants through diagrams and percentages for each question. This allowed me to examine the general trends and was a good visual to understand the overall numbers for each variable. The data was then exported to SPSS v.25, which compiled all data in one application. Any partial responses or those still in progress were not considered for this study. The total amount of participants that completed the survey entirely and whose data was used in the analysis was 85.

Research that is credible relies on quality of measurement to be useful. Two characteristics of measurement to determine the quality of the research are validity and reliability (McMillan, 2012). Validity is the extent to which evidence and inferences are appropriate and meaningful (McMillan, 2012). Inferences and or decisions result from scores generated by a specific measure. This instrument can be valid in one measure and determined to be invalid in another measure. Validity also involves a matter of degree and does not operate on an all-or-none basis while using professional judgment to determine the extent to which an inference is valid. Validity should be established before data is collected and reported in research studies (McMillan, 2012).

Reliability rests on the fact that there is always error to consider in any assessment or research and relies on consistency of scores to examine which scores are free from error (McMillan, 2012). Evidence can be used to indicate error and use a correlation to determine the coefficient and, hence, reliability of the instrument (McMillan, 2012). Reliability is also best established before research begins and should be reported in a study. Established standard conditions must be used to enhance reliability and conditions must be considered as they have a direct effect on the reliability (McMillan, 2012). Although reliable results do not necessarily mean something is valid, “reliability is a necessary condition for validity” (McMillan, 2012, p. 143).

**Validity.** There were three types of validity considered in this study. The first was content validity. This is an important consideration, because it relates the survey to the objective of the research (Karras, 1997). This study sought to determine if there is a relationship between contact with inner city school personnel, diversity training, and policy development specific to sexual minority youth. The questions in the survey instrument were used with permission from

the School Climate Survey conducted by GLSEN (2016) to measure similar variables and research questions.

The survey contained nine questions; these were specific in design to not over sample a specific measure by including redundant questions on the same topic (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). The response answer choices were used from the previous GLSEN (2016) study, which is an annual survey that has validated findings and was piloted before use. There could be a threat to the internal validity due to the questions being rearranged and condensed from the original survey to address the variables in this study.

Another possible threat to the validity is construct validity, which assesses the measurement procedure of a given construct (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). It is considered a process that assesses the validity of measurement that becomes stronger over time but is never absolute (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). By using past research tools and methods that have been developed and tested in past years, the construct validity can be considered strong in this study. Construct validity can be impacted if there is a manipulation of variables. This study did not include a manipulation of variables due to the lack of an experimental and treatment groups. This increases the construct validity by being able to attribute the results to the variables in the study and not external or other content variables (Adams & Lawrence, 2014; Karras, 1997). Additionally, in quantitative research designs the concepts must be narrowed to examine specific constructs (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). In this study the operationalization of the variables was narrowed and included frequency of interactions between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations, inner city school personnel, diversity training, and policy development specific to sexual minority youth. By ensuring the variables were specific the study was not too broad and clear boundaries were constructed.

There was a possibility of participants being biased after reading the survey title about interactions with inner city schools. Participants were aware of the term “inner city,” which can have a negative connotation that influenced responses (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Pre-existing instrument questions were used in this study to limit the effects of any bias (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). The survey and analysis in this research were previously piloted and tested by GLSEN (2016) and these instruments and methods are used annually by researchers.

External validity, which refers to the study being generalized to the public might be considered weak for this study (Johnson & Christensen, 2007; Karras, 1997). Using the specific population of employees and volunteers for the two organizations, GLSEN and HRC, could have negatively influenced the external validity. Although this study required employees and volunteers from organizations who serve inner city schools, there are several other organizations that also do this type of work, both large and small. The organizations selected for this study were among the largest and well-established in the United States and agreed to participate in this study. For this reason, the findings might only be generalized to other organizations that are similar in structure and function.

**Reliability.** The employees and volunteers who participated in the survey were a criterion sample that were sent the survey by the organizations GLSEN and HRC to specific branches throughout the United States. This increased the reliability of the study by eliminating the researcher from the process of distributing the survey in addition to ensuring that no personal information such as email addresses were in this study (Vogt, 2007). If the variables were studied again using this population, it is highly likely that the results would be the same. The organizations distributed the survey via email to multiple inner city branches within their network that work with inner city schools, which eliminated the need to have access to personal

and work email addresses. Participants could elect to take the survey voluntarily, and there were no incentives or funds attributed to the research. The survey was anonymous, and this important detail was included in the email and consent form.

This study used quantitative methods, specifically Pearson's chi-square analysis to test the relationship between variables. Quantitative studies use numerical data collection, which is collected through questionnaires and surveys that examine phenomena deemed fixed and measurable (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). By using a quantitative study that mirrored past researchers, the responses were not open-ended nor were participants' opinions biased. The survey required specific responses (Karras, 1997). This increased the reliability of the study by using specific statistical measurements for fixed survey responses used in previous research (Adams & Lawrence, 2014; Vogt, 2007).

The questions in the survey included scaled responses. This was effective for this study to examine the association among variables that included the contact with inner city school personnel, diversity training, and policy development. Using a quantitative methodology allowed for participants to respond from a larger and broader group from multiple inner city locations. This study followed the same analysis conducted by GLSEN (2016). Following the same analysis as previous researchers designs that have been used annually for years increased the reliability of this study (Muijs, 2011; Vogt, 2007).

Analysis was conducted using the SPSS version 25. Using SPSS, Cronbach's Alpha calculated was .750, which is an acceptable value for most research studies, because the general requirement is between .70 and .90 (Muijs, 2011; Vogt, 2007). Cronbach's Alpha determines the internal reliability of the survey by measuring the internal consistency of the scale or choice responses (Muijs, 2011). Both research questions included categorical variables; therefore,

Pearson's chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if there was significance between variables. This was the best choice, and most reliable method for analysis because of the variables being categorical and the study attempting to determine a relationship among variables (Vogt, 2007).

The first research question included the variables contact with personnel at inner city schools and the request for diversity training at the school, both had scaled responses. The second research question examined the request for diversity training and the enhancement or development of policy, which included a scaled response and a dichotomous response. The chi-square analysis determines whether patterns exist among variables if by using a cross-tabulation table. If the  $p$  value is less than .05 the results are considered statistically significant and there is an association between the variables (Statistics Solutions, 2018).

**Ethical considerations.** In this study, confidentiality was established by utilizing sexual minority youth advocacy organization staff to distribute the survey. This method was useful as there was no need for the researcher to have any identifying information such as emails. Past studies did not engage in this method but did include anonymous responses to protect participants by not including any personal information (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; GLSEN, 2016; Lythgoe, 2013; Robinson & Espleage, 2012). In addition to using the organizations to distribute the survey there was no identifying information included. The only demographic information on the survey was the general location of the participant in efforts to identify the geographic diversity. Major cities were determined but there was nothing in the survey to identify the specific organization or the inner city schools served by the organization.

Participants in this survey were adults that were employed or volunteered for sexual minority youth advocacy organizations. It was important to consider using adults because many

sexual minority youths are reluctant to participate in surveys (Robinson & Espelage, 2012). Youth are fearful of being identified and will not respond to questions or surveys openly even when the survey is anonymous, this is a challenge in gathering information that is representative of sexual minority youth. Adult school personnel can also be fearful to discuss the topic of sexual minority youth due to backlash from other school members or the community (Ciszek, 2014). Selecting adults that work for sexual minority youth advocacy organizations was strategic in efforts to gain more participants that were comfortable discussing this topic. It was imperative to ensure that the identities of participants were protected in addition to selecting only adults to limit discomfort and ethical concerns in participating.

The data collection process must involve researcher analysis, which can include ethical concerns if personal information or other identifying information is in the survey (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). Ethical consideration should include participant and researcher bias (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). Participants Further, interpretation of the data is conducted by the researcher and can be biased creating ethical issues (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). Quantitative data analysis can limit bias from the participants and researcher by offering specific choice responses and statistical analysis (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). Statistical analysis includes, but is not limited to, propensity score matching and least squares model, offers choice responses that are purposeful and directly related to the research questions. Using these methods limits ethical concerns for bias responses and conclusions from the data (Adams & Lawrence, 2014).

Another ethical consideration mentioned in past research is that many of the past surveys have been proctored; meaning participants were being watched while completing the survey (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). This impacts participant comfort and can impact the authenticity of the responses by participants and should be an ethical consideration

(Robinson & Espelage, 2011). In this survey participants were voluntary and there was no requirement to complete the survey, nor was there a proctor during the survey.

The topic of sexual minorities is a sensitive issue that is often ignored (GLSEN, 2018). This ethical factor was considered for the study and was the primary reason to survey adults that were employed or volunteered for sexual minority youth organizations and used research methods to protect the confidentiality and privacy of survey respondents (Adams & Lawrence, 2014; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; GLSEN, 2016; Lythgoe, 2013). This research refrained from reaching out to specific school districts or to sexual minority youth and maintained the participant recruitment plan as discussed in previous chapters. Using personnel or students in school contexts has been done in previous research but is limited in that the topic is sensitive and can be difficult to ensure the comfort of participants, which is an ethical consideration (Craig & Dorian, 2015; GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). By using adults that frequently engage in conversations about sexual minority youth and offer support to this population, it is less likely that participants would feel uncomfortable regarding the topic.

### **Detailed Analysis and Interpretation**

A quantitative correlational analysis was used to analyze whether an association existed between the interactions of sexual minority youth advocacy organizations, inner city school personnel, and diversity training.

Research question 1: What is the frequency of interactions between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel and the personnel utilizing the diversity training offered by the organization?

The researcher used this research question to determine if inner city schools engage with organizations, which personnel within schools engage with organizations, and whether the

schools use diversity training by the organizations. The survey used a scaled response that asked about the positive or helpful engagement opportunities sexual minority advocacy organizations have on average with inner city school leadership and personnel. The survey questions enumerated school personnel asking participants to rate the frequency of engagement with each type of staff member. The focus was on diversity training offered to faculty and staff in inner city schools and how often it was used or requested by personnel. Examination of the data included frequencies and percentages from the scaled responses and cross-tabulation comparative analysis. Each of these analyses included a frequency chart that compared subgroup correlations (see Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5). This is an effective way to analyze the data for this research question as it mirrors the work by GLSEN (2016) and O'Malley and Capper (2015). Table 2 shows the calculations from the comparative analysis.

Table 2

*Inner City School Personnel Interactions with Sexual Minority Advocacy Organizations and the Request for Diversity Training*

Personnel	Value	Degrees of Freedom	Significance <sup>a</sup>	Fisher's exact test (2-sided) <sup>b</sup>
Principal	12.740	2	.002	
Assistant Principals/ Deans	10.352	2	.006	
Social Workers/ Counselors/ Psychologists	1.488	2	.475	
Nurses	.175	1	.676	.792
Resource/Safety Officers	.241	1	.623	.759

*Note.* 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5.

<sup>a</sup>Significance of  $p < .05$  indicates the data is statistically significant resulting in rejecting the null hypothesis and are shown in boldface.

<sup>b</sup> Fisher's exact test only computed for a two by two table.

Two variables were used to determine the relationship of interactions between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city schools and inner city school personnel utilizing diversity training offered. The variables were interactions with inner city school personnel and the request for diversity training. The questions used to answer the research question were categorical. This required a chi-square analysis that compared the interactions with inner city school personnel, including the principal, vice and assistant principal, dean, school social worker, psychologist, nurse, and resource officer, to the request for diversity training.

The chi-square analysis is a nonparametric statistical test that requires each cell in the calculation contingency table to have a value greater than 5 (Vogt, 2007). To ensure the chi-square cells did not have a value less than 5, the data was collapsed (Vogt, 2007). The chi-square analysis cannot have any cells with a value less than 5 or another type of statistical test would have been performed, which is the Fisher's exact test (Muijs, 2011; Vogt, 2007). However, the Fisher's exact test is only for a two by two contingency table (Vogt, 2007). If homogeneous rows and columns collapse the table, the chi-square analysis will determine the effect of the categorical variables (Vogt, 2007).

The cells were collapsed homogeneously and as minimally as possible. For frequency of contact with principals, vice/assistant principals, deans, social workers, counselors, psychologists, the options never and once were collapsed. Request for training options were collapsed by answers "never," "rarely," "and sometimes," with "often" and "very often" remaining separate. Nurses and resource officers required a different collapse. The frequency of interaction collapsed to "never" as a category and combining "once," "a few times," and "many times." Request for training was collapsed to two categories of "never," "rarely," and "sometimes," "often," and "very often."

Pearson's chi-square analysis yielded a statistically significant association between frequency of interactions with inner city school principals and diversity training (Pearson chi-square value = 12.740,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and vice and assistant principals and deans and diversity training (Pearson's chi-square value = 10.352,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .006$ ). Pearson's chi-square analysis did not yield a statistically significant association between frequency of interactions with inner city school social workers, counselors, psychologists and diversity training (Pearson's chi-square value = 1.488,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .475$ ), inner city nurses, medical professionals and diversity training

(Pearson chi-square = .175,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .676$ ), or inner city resource and security officers and diversity training (Pearson chi-square = .241,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .623$ ). The data analysis for nurses, medical professionals, and resource/security officers also calculated a Fisher's exact test because the cell collapse resulted in a two by two matrix (Vogt, 2007). The Fisher's exact test did not yield statistically significant results for the nurses, medical professionals (2-tailed,  $p = .792$ ) or resource and security officers (2-tailed,  $p = .759$ ).

The data analysis did not support the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between the variables of interactions with inner city school personnel and the request for diversity training for inner city school principals and vice/assistant principals, deans and was therefore rejected. The null hypothesis was supported for social workers, counselors, psychologists, nurses, medical professionals, and safety, resource officers.

Research question 1 had a sub-question to determine what personnel at inner city schools' organizations have the most contact with. Using the data table generated from the Qualtrics system, it was determined that the most frequent on-going contact occurs with the school social workers, counselors, and psychologists followed by the principals, vice/assistant principals, deans, nurses, medical professionals, and then safety/resource officers. The number and percentage of responses that included having a helpful or positive conversation a few times or many times with school personnel determined this. Table 3 presents these frequencies of interactions presented in percentages.

Table 3

*Frequency of Interactions between Sexual Minority Advocacy Organizations and Inner City**School Personnel*

Personnel	Never	Once	A few times	Many times
Principal	24.71%	40.00%	25.88%	9.41%
Vice/Assistant principal, dean	56.47%	14.12%	22.35%	7.06%
School counselor, social worker, or psychologist	42.35%	12.94%	32.94%	11.76%
School nurse/medical professional	78.57%	10.71%	5.95%	4.76%
School safety, resource, or security officer	85.88%	10.59%	2.35%	1.18%

Another question on the survey, which was an ordinal scaled response of “very supportive,” “somewhat supportive,” “neutral,” “somewhat unsupportive,” and “very unsupportive,” examined how sexual minority advocacy organizations view the support of leadership in inner city schools regarding sexual minority youth. The analysis included a data table calculated using the Qualtrics system that gave the number and percentage of responses for each category. This type of analysis was also used in the GLSEN (2016) research. More of the responses were “very supportive” and “somewhat supportive,” (35%), than “very unsupportive” and “somewhat unsupportive,” (9.41%). Most of responses (55.29%) regarding the support of school administration for sexual minority youth were neutral. Both Table 4 and Figure 2 show the results of this question.

Table 4

*Sexual Minority Advocacy Organizations View of Administration Support in Inner City Schools*

Support of Administration	Percentage	Count
Very supportive	14.12	12
Somewhat supportive	21.18	18
Neutral	55.29	47
Somewhat unsupportive	7.06	6
Very unsupportive	2.35	2
Total	100	85

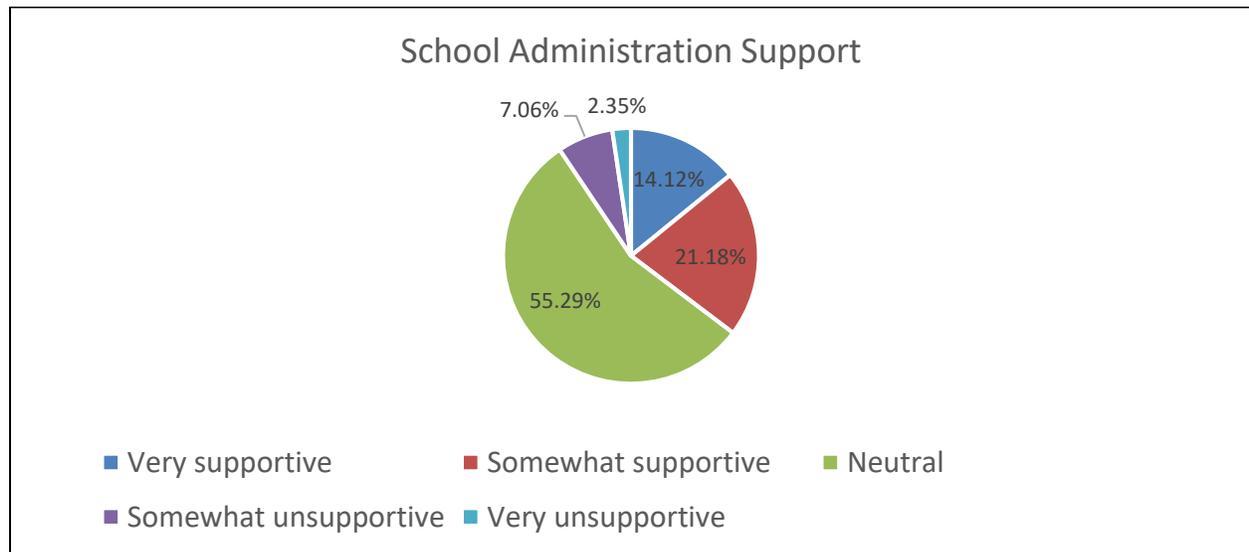


Figure 2. Inner City school administration support.

Figure 2 indicates that most responses show that sexual minority youth advocacy organizations report that inner city school administration is neutral on the topic of sexual minority youth.

The next survey question determined the number of teachers or school staff who were supportive of sexual minority youth in schools; this did not include school administration. The survey by GLSEN (2016) included this question, which was analyzed by determining percentages of the total responses for each of the intervals. The interval scale included “none,” “one,” “between two and five,” “between six and ten,” and “more than ten.” A little more than half of the responses, 57.65%, reported that there were more than 10 teachers and other non-administration staff that were supportive of sexual minority youth at each inner city school served. Only 3.53% of the responses selected indicated that there are no teachers or other school staff that are supportive of sexual minority youth (see Table 5 and Figure 3).

Table 5

*Sexual Minority Advocacy Organizations’ View of Teacher or Other Non-Administration Support in Inner City Schools*

Answer	Percentage	Count
None	3.53	3
One	4.71	4
Between 2 and 5	14.12	12
Between 6 and 10	20.00	17
More than 10	57.65	49
Total	100	85

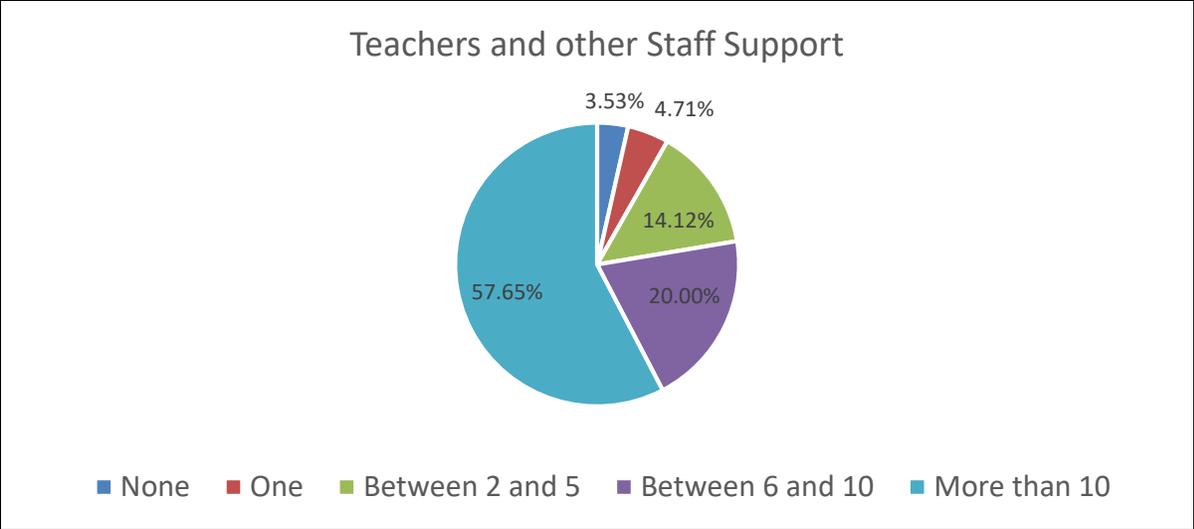


Figure 3. Inner City support of teachers and other non-administration staff.

Research question 2: What is the relationship between diversity training and the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth at the school? The variables included diversity training requested and policy development specific to sexual minority youth.

H2<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between the variables diversity training and policy development specific to sexual minority youth.

The hypothesis was tested using Pearson’s chi-square analysis. As stated, the second research question examined diversity training requested and interest in policy development. The chi-square analysis of two categorical variables like the variables in this study was used by past researchers. Bishop and Atlas (2015) researched the relationship between policy and sexual minority youth issues by surveying school psychologists using survey protocol sent through an email. Using correlational analysis with the data collected, the authors determined schools are not proactive in understanding and implementing sexual minority youth policy, and that there is a disconnect between perspectives of policy and practice. GLSEN (2016) used a similar method to determine a correlation between policy and the inclusion of sexual minority students in

schools. This is an effective method when there are variables that are categorical (Vogt, 2007). The second research question in this study mirrored the analysis by GLSEN (2016) to determine if there is a significant association between diversity training and development of policy.

The survey questions for this research question used categorical scaled responses. Diversity training requested by inner city schools was one variable, which used an ordinal scale of “never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” “often,” and “very often.” Interest in development of policy was the other variable and the question on the survey included the responses of “yes” and “no” in relation to schools’ interest in policy development. Pearson’s chi-square analysis was used to examine the variables. Cells were collapsed when the chi-square analysis was conducted for the diversity-training request question to include “never,” “rarely,” and a combination of “sometimes,” “often,” and “very often.” Pearson’s chi-square analysis yielded a statistically significant association between diversity training and the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth (Pearson chi-square value =19.657,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The null hypothesis was rejected, and the results show there is an association between variables. Table 6 the Pearson’s chi-square results.

Table 6

*Request for Diversity Training and Interest in Policy Development*

Pearson Chi-Square	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
19.657	2	.000

*Note.* 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.53.

Policy regarding bullying and harassment is typically written in documents and implemented in schools due to an increase in awareness surrounding student comfort in school environments but does not include sexual minority youth specifically (GLSEN, 2018; HRC,

2018). According to researchers, overwhelmingly, 85.88% of schools already have a bullying and harassment policy in place but not necessarily specific to sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). One question on the survey asked whether the specific state (FL, MD, NY) in which the employee or volunteer worked has a policy to support sexual minorities. It was reported that 88.24% of the respondents' states have a policy in place that is specific for sexual minorities. This does not assume that the policy is not necessarily implemented or enforced in educational settings.

An examination of states with anti-bullying laws that protect sexual minority youth was conducted. Those states include Maine, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, Maryland and the District of Columbia, North Carolina, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Colorado, California, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington (GLSEN, 2018). This will be important for future research to determine if having the state laws affects the development of school policy that specifically enumerates sexual minority youth in bullying or harassment language.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to understand whether sexual minority youth advocacy organizations engage with inner city schools and whether this leads to the awareness about sexual minority youth and enhanced advocacy for this population through the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth. A survey was distributed via email from the organizations to workers and volunteers throughout the United States. There were 85 usable responses from a population of approximately 240 for a response rate of 35%. Most of the participants were in the Northeast, but responses did include the Southeast, Midwest, and Southwest regions.

In this study there was an overarching question, two research questions, and one sub-question. After running a chi-square analysis, it was determined that the null hypothesis, there is no relationship between interactions by organizations with inner city school personnel and diversity training requested by inner city schools, could be rejected for principals, vice/assistant principals, and deans. The null hypothesis was accepted for the social workers, counselors, psychologists, nurses, medical professionals, and safety, resource officers. A sub-question was used to determine which inner city school personnel were most frequently in contact with the organizations. The results showed the most frequent contact was with the school social workers, counselors, psychologists followed by the principals, vice/assistant principals, deans, and then nurses, medical professionals, and lastly safety, resource officers.

In the second research question analyzed if there was a relationship between the request for diversity training (independent variable) and the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth (dependent variable). Pearson's chi-square analysis was used and showed that the null hypothesis, there is no relationship between diversity training requested in inner city schools and the development of policy could be rejected, indicating a relationship between the variables.

In conclusion, the data was statistically significant for frequency of interactions by sexual minority advocacy organizations and the inner city school principals, vice/assistant principals, and deans. The data was also statistically significant between diversity training and policy development specific to sexual minority youth. Although there was a question about policy in states on the survey, the data was not linked to a specific research question. This will be useful in the future to determine the influence of state level policy. The data from this study can be

expanded upon to include more organizations that are throughout the United States and give detailed responses to this important topic.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

In the United States, sexual minority youth may experience discrimination in schools that leads to negative consequences, such as dropping out and suicide (Ciszek, 2014; GLSEN, 2016). Sexual minority youth advocacy organizations exist throughout the United States and are established to help schools create safer, more supportive environments for all students, particularly sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). The purpose of this study was to understand whether sexual minority youth advocacy organizations engage with inner city schools and whether this leads to the awareness about sexual minority youth and enhanced advocacy for this population through the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth.

In this study, 85 participants completed the closed-ended survey that was sent via email from GLSEN and HRC to their employees and volunteers located at inner city branches of the organization. Data obtained from the survey was then exported from Qualtrics and analyzed using SPSS version 25. This chapter summarizes the study, discusses the results and how they relate to the literature, discusses the limitations and implications for further practice, policy, and theory, and recommends further research on how to enhance inner city school environments for sexual minority youth.

### **Summary of the Results**

This study presented two research questions and one sub-question. The research focused on examining how inner city schools are working to better serve sexual minority youth through the help of organizations that advocate for this population and offer diversity training and assistance with policy development. The research questions were as follows:

Overarching Question: How does school engagement of sexual minority youth advocacy organizations lead to school advocacy for this population?

Research question 1: What is the frequency of interactions between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations with inner city school personnel and the personnel utilizing the diversity training offered by the organization? The variables include (a) interactions with inner city school personnel and (b) request for diversity training.

Sub question 1: Which personnel at inner city schools do organizations have the most frequent contact with? School personnel is enumerated and includes the principal, vice/assistant principal, dean, school social worker, psychologist, counselor, school nurse, medical professional, school resource or security officer.

Research question 2: What is the relationship between diversity training and the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth at the school? The variables include (a) diversity training requested and (b) policy development.

H1<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between interactions by organizations with inner city school personnel and diversity training requested by inner city schools.

H2<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between diversity training requested in inner city schools and the development of policy.

Cultural norms often go unchallenged, leading to discrimination and negative outcomes for minority populations (GLSEN, 2016; White, Moeller, Ivcevic, Brackett, & Stern, 2018). The theory of heteronormativity discusses the perceived cultural norms of male and female roles (McNeill, 2013). Heteronormativity assists in shaping the school environment, which can be uncomfortable for sexual minority students due to bias, lack of integrated curriculum, little or no support from faculty and staff, and disparities in such things as extracurricular activities

(Freedman et al., 2013; GLSEN, 2016; McNeill, 2013; Newman & Fantus, 2015). Lack of inclusion in a school context can be distressing for any student. It is important to challenge the theory of heteronormativity and bring more awareness to the disparities and maltreatment sexual minority youth face in schools.

Students that identify or are perceived as sexual minorities often have more negative experiences in schools compared to non-sexual minority peers (GLSEN, 2016; White et al., 2018). The research on this topic has generally focused on suburban areas, limiting the understanding of sexual minority youth populations in inner city areas. This study raises awareness of how inner city schools are seeking support for sexual minority youth by utilizing the services of organizations that are devoted to improving school environments through diversity training and school policy development that specifically targets sexual minority youth issues. This study also enhances the understanding of inner city schools' efforts to improve school experiences for sexual minority youth and promote further research on this topic.

A substantial amount of research has been devoted to understanding the experiences of sexual minority youth in schools (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). These studies have largely taken place in suburban areas and shed light upon the negative experiences of students who identify or are perceived as sexual minorities in the context of the school environment (Freedman et al., 2013; GLSEN, 2016; McNeill, 2013; Newman & Fantus, 2015). White et al. (2018) conducted an online survey that included a racially and economically diverse population of adolescents from all 50 states that identify as sexual minority and those who do not. Results from the study showed sexual minority high school students experience significantly more bullying and negative emotions compared to non-sexual minority peers, which is consistent with past research. Payne and Smith (2017) used field notes and interviews to

collect data; they found that school leaders are resistant to diversity training in schools for various reasons, which negatively affect sexual minority student experiences in schools.

Experiences for sexual minority youth in the context of the school setting can be very different than their heterosexual peers (GLSEN, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2017). It has been reported that not only are sexual minority youth in schools more frequently bullied or harassed, but that homosexual remarks go unchallenged by both faculty and staff (GLSEN, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2017; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). This can cause feelings of rejection and a sense of not being protected by those in authority at schools. Diversity training is a necessary step to develop competence surrounding this issue and establishing safe schools for all students; it is an important topic to continue to consider regarding improving school policy (Payne & Smith, 2017).

Diversity training incorporates awareness about the topic, strategies to improve the environment for the population, and can include constructs that are important for school policy development specific to sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). As schools continue to ignore the issues sexual minority youth confront in the school context, negative consequences will continue for this population. The theoretical framework for this study discussed the need to challenge cultural norms and heteronormativity using organizations such as GLSEN and HRC that advocate for sexual minority youth, and the programs and training they offer. This can only be achieved if requested by the school. Unfortunately, diversity training on the topic is not mandatory (Castro & Sujak, 2012).

Organizations such as GLSEN and HRC can reach out to schools to inform them of the services provided, or the school initiate contact to request support. In Payne and Smith's (2017) study, sexual minority advocacy organization staff indicated that it is a struggle to communicate

with schools when outreach is funneled through a school principal. Participants in the study reported that communication related to diversity training is more efficient through assistant principals and counselors. Further, the critical framework of the study discussed how once communication is established, it is more likely that awareness and understanding could be accomplished with the desire to improve the school environment.

In this study, the findings confirm the need for communication between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and inner city school leadership personnel. Data analysis indicates that there is an association between communication with inner city school leadership and the request for diversity training at the school. Data collection for this study used a survey link generated through the Qualtrics system and was distributed via email by the organizations GLSEN and HRC after the application for research was approved. Both organizations distributed the survey to employees and volunteers located in inner city branches of the organization. As the researcher, I specified the locations where the survey should be sent.

The survey was developed with permission from the GLSEN (2016) climate survey. Both research questions used categorical variables, which required Pearson's chi-square analysis, which was conducted using SPSS version 25. The analysis mirrored the original survey development and data analysis by using Pearson's chi-square to determine the associations between variables (GLSEN, 2016). The categories were collapsed accordingly to ensure the cells of the chi-square did not contain a value less than five. For the cells that were collapsed to a two by two matrix, a Fisher's exact test was also performed.

The chi-square and Fisher's exact test results showed statistically significant and non-significant findings. The first research question analyzed the relationship between the frequency of interactions with inner city school personnel and sexual minority advocacy organizations for

diversity training at schools. The data showed a statistically significant outcome for the frequency of interactions and request for diversity training with the principal, vice/assistant principal, and dean. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Analysis revealed that interactions between sexual minority advocacy organizations with the school counselor, social worker, psychologist, nurse, and safety, resource officer are not statistically significant. Interactions were most frequent with school social workers, counselors, and psychologists followed by the principals, vice/assistant principals, deans, nurses, and then safety, resource officers.

The second research question analyzed relationship between inner city school personnel requesting diversity training and whether this training led to the development of school policy specific to sexual minorities. The second research question used Pearson's chi-square analysis for the variables diversity training and policy development. Data showed that the results are statistically significant as indicated by a chi-square value less than .05 (Vogt, 2007). The null hypothesis was rejected for this research question, because there is an association between diversity training and policy development, indicating that when a school has diversity training it is likely going to develop policy to increase awareness to support sexual minority youth.

### **Discussion of the Results**

The findings of this study showed statistically significant and insignificant results for the first research question. Findings from the first research question in this study indicated that the frequency of interaction between sexual minority advocacy organizations and school administration show statistically meaningful results when diversity training is implemented in schools but is not statistically significant when comparing interactions with school non-administration personnel and diversity training requested. If the contact between sexual minority

advocacy organizations with the leadership in the school, principal and vice/assistant principal, dean, is reported as occurring “a few times,” or “many times,” the request for diversity training is likely to occur “sometimes,” “often,” or “very often.” But if the contact between sexual minority advocacy organizations with leadership occurs “never” or “once,” a request for diversity training is “never” or “rarely” requested. This finding indicates that there is a relationship between the frequency leadership interacts with sexual minority advocacy organizations and the request for diversity training. The frequency of interactions between sexual minority advocacy organizations with school social worker, counselor, psychologist, nurses, and resource officers do not have an association to the request for diversity training.

Researchers have discussed how school leadership contributes to the culture and climate of the school, which is influenced by societal cultural norms and perceptions that are homophobic (Payne & Smith, 2013; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). To challenge cultural norms embedded with bias and stereotypes, leadership can implement professional development opportunities such as diversity training for faculty and staff. Diversity training can be designed specifically to address sexual minority youth issues to develop awareness about this topic among school personnel. These training opportunities can include resources and teaching strategies to improve the school environment for sexual minority student populations (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Although interactions between sexual minority advocacy organizations with many different faculty and staff in a school, it is ultimately the leadership of the school that determines what type of professional development opportunities are made available for school staff (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). It is encouraging that the data in this study demonstrates that there is a relationship between sexual minority advocacy organizations frequency of interactions with school leadership and diversity training requested.

Frequency of interaction between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and inner city school personnel is ranked highest among the school social worker, counselor, and psychologist. The school social worker, counselor, and psychologist's role at the school is often related to helping students that are having difficulties or emotional struggles, which according to past researchers, is more frequent among sexual minority youth within a school student population (GLSEN, 2016). The chi-square analysis in this study did not show statistically meaningful results for these personnel in relation to requesting diversity training. Additionally, the results are not statistically significant for nurses or resource officers. This makes sense, since the leadership of a school is primarily responsible for requesting and implementing diversity trainings (Payne & Smith, 2017).

This does not specifically show that school personnel other than leadership cannot influence what type of diversity training occurs. Rather there is a relationship between the frequency of contact sexual minority youth organizations have with leadership and the request for diversity training. It is possible for leadership to also be influenced by other school faculty and staff (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). The influence of other school personnel is limited by the staff relationship with leadership and whether leadership is open to suggestions by staff members (Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). The school principal is primarily responsible for the decision to implement diversity training for faculty and staff and can avoid implementing diversity training due to fear of retaliation or negativity by other faculty, staff, community members, or district employees (Payne & Smith, 2013; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013).

Newman and Fantus (2015) found that heteronormativity and cultural norms shape the school environment, and that there are challenges at many schools to enhance the school environment for sexual minority youth. Researchers have found that there is a general fear at

schools to challenge heteronormativity, which leads to such things as homophobic remarks or non-inclusive curriculum and instruction due to a lack of understanding about this population and policy that supports sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). When leadership cultivate an environment the welcomes suggestions, other personnel can offer a unique perspective on how to make improvements on difficult topics such as sexual minority youth. When school leadership encourages an inclusive and democratic environment, perspectives can be shared by other faculty and staff, which are essential to making school environments more sustainable for diverse populations (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Taysum, 2016).

When a school hosts diversity training for faculty and staff, there is an increased awareness about sexual minority youth and how the school environment can be negative for this population, which can prompt participants to become interested in solutions (GLSEN, 2018; Payne & Smith, 2017). This study found that there was a relationship between diversity training leads and the development or enhancement of policy to support sexual minority youth. With diversity training, there is often more awareness surrounding this topic and an understanding that sexual minorities experience disparities that can lead to negative outcomes (GLSEN, 2018; Payne & Smith, 2017).

Diversity training can include a discussion on policy and on strategies on how to develop policy to be more inclusive of sexual minority youth. Case studies can be presented to school personnel that demonstrate how other schools have successfully implemented policy to support and protect sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2018). Policy is an imperative part of a solution to ensure the safety of this population and the ability to navigate circumstances that are negative such as bullying or harassment. Creating diversity-training opportunities on the topic of sexual

minority youth among school personnel may help to create an environment that is more conducive to developing or enhancing policy for this population. Past research findings show that exposure to diversity training increases awareness to the circumstances around and sensitivity to minority populations such as sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2018; Payne & Smith, 2017).

A study conducted by Marchetti (2015) indicated that having a state or district policy does affect the interest and development of advocacy groups. State or district policy can mandate diversity training occur in schools, eliminating the avoidance of many school personnel pertaining to the topic of sexual minority youth. As stated, other school faculty and staff often do not feel comfortable discussing sexual minority issues due to fear of leadership disapproval or retaliation and school leadership can be fearful of community or district retaliation (Payne & Smith, 2013; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013). Mandating training and having a policy dedicated to sexual minority students in schools can encourage other school personnel to advocate for this population without the fear of retaliation and could reduce tragedies such as suicide among sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2018; Payne & Smith, 2013). This can also lead to challenging cultural norms that have been established over time that are embedded with values and beliefs that often do not support or protect sexual minorities (Ozdemer, & Buyukgoze, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2013).

By engaging with sexual minority advocacy organizations, schools have the potential to increase understanding about sexual minority youth, which can encourage more inclusive ideas and perceptions about how to create more positive school environments for this population (Payne & Smith, 2013). Engaging with sexual minority advocacy organizations could also establish a relationship between personnel at the school and employees or volunteers from the

organization. This could lead to safer and supportive school environment for sexual minority youth by developing trust and on-going communication between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and school personnel (GLSEN, 2018).

Organizations such as GLSEN and HRC aid schools in developing safer environments that welcome diversity, and when there is a strong relationship between the advocacy organization and school, it is likely that schools will ask for assistance from the organization. Assistance can come in the form of continued awareness, safe spaces for all students in the school, and policy development. Sexual minority youth advocacy organizations assist with developing policy specific to sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). Once policy is developed there should be action-oriented steps to implement the policy and actions to take if the policy is violated (O'Malley & Capper, 2015).

An on-going relationship between the school and sexual minority youth advocacy organizations will support the school during policy establishment and enforcement. Additionally, sexual minority youth advocacy organizations assistance to schools can be more than policy development; it can encompass GSAs, curriculum components, and instruction. Working with the sexual minority youth advocacy organization may lead to the school incorporating more comprehensive measures to bring equity to student populations.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

It is important to continue understanding practices that ensure sexual minority students are safe and supported in schools. White et al. (2018) conducted a study that showed students that identify or are perceived as sexual minorities have a much different school experience than those who do identify as such; they are bullied, harassed, left out of extra-curricular opportunities. Sexual minority youth advocacy organizations such as GLSEN and HRC offer

opportunities for schools to engage in diversity training to improve the school environment for students and create safe spaces in which sexual minority students feel valued and welcomed (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). By continuing to utilize this resource, the practice of creating a more positive school environment can occur in schools. Understanding how schools engage with such resources can bring awareness to the issue and help both the organization and school personnel bring positive changes to the school environment for sexual minority youth. White et al. (2018) established that even with an increase in sexual minority advocacy organizations throughout the nation, schools do not necessarily utilize this resource, and there is still a need to improve school environments.

Literature shows that leadership personnel contribute to school culture and climate, which can cause other faculty and staff to be fearful in speaking out about sexual minority issues (Freedman et al., 2013; Mayo, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2017). School leadership should lead campus discussions on diversity training and create open dialogue for faculty and staff to participate in policy development to protect and support sexual minority youth on campus. This should occur not only because they are leaders but because they also are largely responsible for approving and providing professional development (Payne & Smith, 2017).

The results of this study show a relationship between the frequencies of communication with sexual minority organizations by school leadership to the request for diversity training. As school leaders, principals, vice/assistant principals, and deans engage with the sexual minority youth advocacy organization, it is more likely that diversity training will be requested. Payne and Smith (2017) conducted a study on leadership and access to professional development in schools that focused on sexual minority youth. The study showed that leadership advocated for sexual minority youth at different rates and that the commitment to equity for all students varied

based on leadership support towards sexual minority youth. Access to professional development opportunities such as diversity training is not abundant if at all available, and other faculty and staff reported through the survey there is a barrier to learning about sexual minority youth (Payne & Smith, 2017). This current study also reported varying frequencies in engagement with sexual minority advocacy organizations by school leadership. While it is reported that school leadership varies in support for sexual minority students, other groups of faculty and staff such as teachers report being supportive of sexual minority youth.

The study by Payne and Smith (2017) reported that it is difficult to contact school principals regarding diversity-training opportunities on the topic of sexual minorities. In their study, an outreach method was used to contact schools regarding free training on this topic. Responses from principals were so low that organizations sought contact with other school personnel and found vice/assistant principals, deans, and counselors are more likely to respond with interest. Payne and Smith's (2017) findings support the findings in this study, which found that the most frequent on-going contact is indeed with vice/ assistant principals, deans, and counselors. It was reported that there was communication with principals, but it was generally one time and did not continue throughout the school year. Nonetheless, this study shows that advocacy organization contact with school leadership is the most important for diversity training to take place. School leadership has multiple tasks, so it is important for sexual minority youth advocacy organizations to continue outreach to inform leadership about the topic and the potentially devastating consequences that still occur among this population.

Research shows that having school staff that are knowledgeable about inclusive practices across curriculum, instruction, opportunities, and activities is helpful in developing supportive environments for sexual minority student populations (Brant, 2017; Bryan & Mayock, 2017;

Meyer et al., 2015; Nevatia et al., 2012). It is also imperative that faculty and staff are trained in intervention techniques to stop or assist in preventing harassment toward sexual minority students (Brant, 2017; GLSEN, 2018). Schools that engage with sexual minority organizations can implement practices that enhance school culture and improve outcomes for sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). It is important to consider policy that includes sexual minorities and enumerates actionable steps when violations occur such as name-calling, bullying, violence, or discrimination (Baams, Dubas, & van Aken, 2017; O'Malley & Capper, 2015).

External organizations are available to assist with the process of policy development and the implementation of policy through trainings for school personnel. A study by O'Malley and Capper (2015) indicated that training assists in ease and ability to implement new policy that includes the topic of sexual minority youth. As indicated by the findings of this study, requests for diversity training affects the development of policy specific to sexual minority students. By using a resource such as diversity training offered by sexual minority youth advocacy organizations, schools can be informed and equipped for policy development. Working toward incorporating enumerated policy specific to the population of sexual minorities is critical to enhance the environment but can be challenging due to the topic being so difficult to discuss in heteronormative environments (Baams et al., 2017; O'Malley & Capper, 2015).

### **Limitations**

There were a few limitations in this study. The lack of demographic information about participants was one limitation. There was only one question on the survey that collected demographic information from participant; it asked about the general geographic location of the participant. The Concordia University Institutional Review Board was strongly against including additional demographic information due to the ease of identifying participants. The Review

Board explained how it was apparent the information could lead to the identification of the participants and the researcher agreed removing the demographic information was necessary. A question about gender was also removed out of sensitivity for the population of study.

Most survey respondents (90.6%) were from the Northeast region of the United States. Other respondent regions included the Southeast, Midwest, and Southwest United States. There were a variety of cities represented, many of which were highly populated Northeastern cities. If there were more participants that represented other geographical areas the study would be strengthened by not only increasing the sample size, but also diversifying the population geographically. Geographic diversity could reveal trends in school treatment, training, and policy related to the support and protection of sexual minority youth by region and inform advocacy groups address specific school needs.

The sample size for the study was 85, which was a response rate of 35% based on a total population of 240 employees and volunteers that engage with inner city schools from the organizations GLSEN and HRC. While there were enough responses to analyze the data effectively, it is possible that much of the population did not respond to the survey due to time constraints or being overwhelmed with survey requests. As prominent advocacy organizations throughout the nation, there are often requests for survey completion by outside sources. The email to the employees and volunteers did state that the survey was brief to increase possible participation. Since there were no incentives associated with the study participation was voluntary, which could also have affected the sample size.

Another limitation in this study was only being able to use the organizations GLSEN and HRC. An email was sent to multiple organizations that included the link to the survey. The organizations included: Everyone is Gay, Gender Spectrum, GSA Network, It Gets Better

Project, National Youth Pride Services, Point Foundation, Safe Schools Coalition, The Trevor Project, and the Tyler Clementi Foundation. The selected organizations are all large, located throughout the United States, and committed to improving the school environment for sexual minority youth. The Gender Spectrum responded, and a separate application was sent in according to the website protocol. However, the only confirmation for distribution of the survey was from GLSEN and HRC.

It would be beneficial to be able to engage with other organizations that serve sexual minorities. The results of this study are significant to large organizations, but it would help if the study were repeated to include other similar organizations. Due to time constraints in working to get the survey out in a timely manner, contact with the organizations was only pursued for a short period of time, and the most responsive organizations were GLSEN and HRC. Having more time might allow for more engagement with the organizations to possibly commit to an outside study. The organization PFLAG was originally contacted but did not agree to participate, as they do not have the capacity to engage with outside research. This is a difficult challenge, but there are multiple large organizations that are willing to participate. It would also be interesting to include smaller organizations that engage with schools on this topic.

### **Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

This study showed that school leadership continues to be a major influence the culture and climate of the school and are the most frequent to request diversity training. There is a significant difference in school leadership, which includes principals, vice or assistant principals, deans, and then other school personnel, including counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses, and resource officers, regarding the request for diversity training. By establishing communication with school leadership, it is more likely that the diversity training will be

requested and implemented in the school to improve practices for sexual minority youth (Payne & Smith, 2017).

Examination of the results shows the importance for organizations to continue to engage with schools, especially leadership within the school. By establishing a strong relationship, there can be a sense of trust and more authentic conversations about the topic, which brings awareness to the issue's sexual minorities face and challenge heteronormativity and cultural norms to establish better practices that support sexual minority youth (Singleton & Linton, 2006). School personnel, including leadership, can be fearful to discuss the topic of sexual minorities in anticipation of backlash from other personnel, employees, or the community (Ciszek, 2014). Sexual minority advocacy organizations offer outreach to assist schools in opening a staff wide discussion on the topic and the importance of improving schools' environments to be more inclusive (GLSEN, 2018).

Sexual minority youth advocacy organizations are an imperative resource to the development of schools that are not only safe, but also inclusive of sexual minorities. Understanding the interactions between these organizations and inner city schools can lead to new outreach practices.

Regarding the development of policy, Singleton and Linton (2006) discussed how personal beliefs and biases can shape the culture and climate. It is only when these are challenged that improvements can be made; however, this requires authentic conversations and personal reflection. By raising awareness about the issue and the extreme consequences that are occurring at schools, organizations hope that school leadership will begin to incorporate conversations about sexual minorities regularly through such things as diversity training and policy development. Yet this can only be accomplished if school leadership understands the

importance of discussions of this type, regardless of their own personal beliefs. This was true in the study by Payne and Smith (2017), which showed that even when outreach to school leadership occurs, the responses vary in relation to achieving equity for sexual minority students.

Before conducting the survey, I expected that leadership would be the primary source for implementing training, with the potential that other school personnel could influence the decision. In this study, school leadership and diversity training were statistically significant, whereas other school personnel and diversity training were not statistically significant. However, other school personnel can influence school leadership when they are supportive of sexual minority youth and possess a desire for equity. In this study there were other personnel in schools who were supportive of sexual minority youth. According to the survey, multiple teachers could be found in school buildings that support the advancement of equity for this population.

Much of the on-going conversations with organizations occur with the school counselor, social worker, and psychologist. This was predicted due to the nature of the topic and how schools handle bullying and harassment, as well as the emotional struggles that students encounter. Incidents such as skipping school or attempted suicide are reported among sexual minority youth at increased rates (GLSEN, 2016), which can lead to the school counselor, social worker, and psychologist becoming involved. This shows the importance for all types of personnel to be aware of the challenges faced by sexual minority youth at the school and the necessity for diversity training to be staff-wide. Faculty and staff all must be trained regardless of personal biases to appropriately handle situations that involve sexual minorities to ensure the health and safety of sexual minority students (Brant, 2017).

Organizations such as GLSEN and HRC are committed to developing meaningful diversity training opportunities that raise the awareness of the issue's sexual minorities face in schools and how detrimental the consequences are (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). Training provided by organizations such as GLSEN and HRC increase awareness first and then move to implementing policy and practices that facilitate the advancement of sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2018; HRC, 2018). Data analysis in this study showed that there is a positive relationship between requesting diversity training and the interest to develop policy. As more knowledge about this topic is presented to faculty and staff in schools, it becomes more likely that stakeholders understand the cause for concern and will be interested in taking actionable steps. This information about the effect of diversity training is pertinent to the practice of organizations and inner city schools.

As societal established cultural norms have a negative effect on sexual minority youth in schools, equity promoting programs work to challenge these norms and improve school environments to be more inclusive through awareness and actionable steps that support and protect this population (Hislop, 2013; Singleton & Linton, 2006). The findings of this study relate to the theory of heteronormativity and cultural norms: it can be challenging to understand the effect of these factors on the school environment and how this negatively influences sexual minority youth. Organizations that specialize in assisting sexual minority youth can help bring awareness to this topic to work with schools to develop solutions in specific school contexts to help increase support this population.

As stated previously in this chapter, leadership is primarily responsible for shaping the culture and climate of the school and is often influenced by heteronormativity and cultural norms that negatively affect sexual minority youth. Avoidance of topics that relate to sexual minorities

persists in schools due to imbedded biases and ideologies (Newman & Fantus, 2015). In this study, many of the survey respondents did not assert that inner city school faculty and staff are supportive of sexual minority youth. This may be indicative of how cultural norms and the theory of heteronormativity that is embedded in common practices can shape the perception of the population causing a lack of support for them and continued marginalization.

The theoretical framework for this study included cultural norms and heteronormativity, equity, leadership and training, and policy as they relate to improving school environments for sexual minority youth. This study was specific to inner city areas due to lack of previous research in how inner city schools engage with sexual minority youth organizations. Prior studies had findings that established that sexual minority youth throughout the country experience disparities and discrimination (GLSEN, 2018; HRC; 2018). Sexual minority youth advocacy organizations work to eliminate the disparities and discrimination faced by this population by offering training and support, which was supported by this study. Within the theoretical framework it was established that leadership in schools shape the climate and culture of the school (Freedman et al. 2013; O'Malley & Caper, 2015). Training can bring awareness about the difficulties sexual minority youth have in schools, but it is the leadership in schools that facilitate training experiences. This study showed a positive relationship between communication with inner city school leadership with sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and the interest in diversity training at the school level.

The data analysis revealed a positive relationship between inner city school engagement with sexual minority youth organizations and the development of policy specific to sexual minority youth. Bringing awareness to this topic is a way to improve school environments for sexual minority youth. According to the theoretical framework, policy that is developed to

improve the school environment for sexual minority youth is difficult to establish without training specific to this issue, and school leadership that is supportive of this initiative (Bishop & Atlas, 2015; GLSEN, 2016). By establishing a relationship between inner city schools and sexual minority youth advocacy organizations, there is an interest to develop policy, which can benefit sexual minority youth (GLSEN, 2016).

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The study was limited to the results of participants who either work or volunteer in inner cities for organizations GLSEN and HRC. Due to personal time constraints and convenience, these organizations were selected because both responded quickly, communication was frequent with the director's, and they agreed to participate in the study. Both organizations' headquarters are located on the East coast. There are a variety of other well-known organizations that exist throughout the nation that work to improve inner city school environments for sexual minority youth, but they did not agree to participate in this study.

Advocacy organizations vary in size and location but have a commitment to improving outcomes for this population. It is recommended for research to continue to examine the interactions between more organizations and inner city schools to better understand how to engage in diversity training and policy advancement. Future studies of advocacy organizations interactions with schools can vary in size, capacity, and location. By continuing research on how organizations assist schools, further successful practices can be developed and implemented.

Many of the participants in this study indicated they were located on the East coast, which is likely due to the organizations' primary location being there. Although the organizations have multiple branches, the primary location is on the East coast and there are factors that also could have affected the response rate such as, but not limited to, having

familiarity with the person sending the survey within the organization or the time the survey was sent being convenient on the East coast but not necessarily elsewhere. Expanding the research to include more geographical locations throughout the nation is strongly suggested. Although there were a variety of responses from multiple inner city areas, many other urban areas were not represented in this study. Other organizations based out of areas such as California and might increase the geographic demographics and provide further insights to this topic. In the future, research could also compare the results to this study to determine if there are differences in organizational perceptions based on geographical locations.

Future research can focus on why the diversity training is requested and if the decision to implement this type of training has multiple influences. Although the leadership in schools request diversity training and it is presented to faculty and staff, it is possible that other school personnel influence leadership about the importance of this topic. It would be beneficial to determine the influencing factors on leadership decisions to implement diversity training. Additionally, expanding on this study to include qualitative data will lend more insight to this topic and the factors that could influence inner city school decisions to implement diversity training.

The policy section in the survey for this study did include a question about schools already having a policy in place and if there is a state-wide policy. In the future, this can be used to determine if having a policy in place at the school or at the state level affects the request for diversity training or the interest to develop policy to support sexual minority youth. Prior research by Marchetti (2015) concluded that state policy influences local interest groups. Expanding on this to determine if it can affect inner city school interest among personnel to

enhance the environment for sexual minority youth and the development of specific policy dedicated to sexual minorities among inner city schools would be beneficial research.

## **Conclusion**

This study shows that there is a relationship between frequency of communication between sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and inner city school leadership personnel to the request for diversity training by inner city school leadership. It also shows the request for diversity training results in an interest to develop policy that would be inclusive of sexual minority youth. A null hypothesis was established for both research questions and a survey instrument was used to collect data. The survey was developed with permission from the GLSEN (2016) school climate survey and included consent information for prospective respondents. Using a survey link generated by the Qualtrics system, GLSEN and HRC sent it out via email to its branches that serve inner city schools. Responses were analyzed for 85 participants using SPSS version 25.

The results indicate that there is a relationship between school leadership communication with sexual minority youth advocacy organizations and the request for diversity training. There is no relationship between communication with other personnel by the organizations and the request for diversity training. This aligns with previous research that concludes leadership shapes the school culture and climate. There is also a relationship between the request for diversity training and the interest to develop policy. This also aligned with prior research that discusses the importance of advocacy organizations in helping schools increase awareness about this topic to begin finding solutions for improving school culture for sexual minorities.

Expanding on this research in the future is important to continue to understand how inner city schools utilize sexual minority organizations to improve the climate and culture. The theory

of heteronormativity and cultural norms continue to persist in society causing disparities for sexual minority youth. Challenging these factors is a difficult task but essential to ensuring all students are safe and supported in schools. Sexual minority organizations offer aid and support on this topic, but this help is only be useful if the schools allow it. Ultimately, when we avoid challenging topics such as heteronormativity, it is the students who suffer. All students deserve and educational environment that is safe and that works toward equitable outcomes or society will continue to witness devastating consequences such as drop-outs and suicide.

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## Appendix A: Survey Questions

### Sexual Minority Youth Advocacy Organizations and School Engagement

Instructions: Please click the response that best represents your demographic information.

#### Demographic Questions:

1. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Other
2. Please identify yourself as the following:
  - a. Minority
  - b. Non-Minority
3. What is the general geographic location where your organization is located?
  - a. Northeast
  - b. Southeast
  - c. Midwest
  - d. Northwest
  - e. Southwest

#### Research Questions:

Instructions: Please select the best answer that represents your experience as a worker/volunteer for organizations that works to improve school experiences for sexual minority youth.

1. During the past school year, how often have you had a positive or helpful conversation about sexual minority youth issues with any of the following people at a school?

Teacher:      a. Never                      b. Once                      c. A few times                      d. Many times

Principal:      a. Never                      b. Once                      c. A few times                      d. Many times

Vice/assistant

Principal

or Dean      a. Never                      b. Once                      c. A few times                      d. Many times

School counselor,

school social worker or

school

psychologist: a. Never                      b. Once                      c. A few times                      d. Many times

School nurse or

other school

medical

professional: a. Never                      b. Once                      c. A few times                      d. Many times



## Appendix B: Qualtrics Report

Q1 - What is the general geographical location where your organization is located?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Northeast	90.59	77
2	Southeast	5.88	5
3	Midwest	1.18	1
4	Northwest	0	0
5	Southwest	2.35	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>

Q2 - During the past school year, how often have you had a positive or helpful conversation about sexual minority youth issues with any of the following people at a school?

Participant	Never	Once	A few times	Many times
Principal	24.71% (21)	40.00% (34)	25.88% (22)	9.41% (8)
Vice/Assistant principal, dean	56.47% (48)	14.12% (12)	22.35% (19)	7.06% (6)
School counselor, social worker, or psychologist	42.35% (36)	12.94% (11)	32.94% (28)	11.76% (10)
School nurse or other school medical professional	78.57% (66)	10.71% (9)	5.95% (5)	4.76% (4)
School safety, resource, or security officer	85.88% (73)	10.59% (9)	2.35% (2)	1.18% (1)

Q3 - Based on your organization's experiences, how frequently do schools request sexual minority youth programs/training be implemented in the school?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Never	24.71	21
2	Rarely	23.53	20
3	Sometimes	36.47	31
4	Often	12.94	11
5	Very often	2.35	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>

Q4 - How supportive is the school administration (Principal, Vice Principal, etc.) of sexual minority youth in the schools that your organization serves?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Very supportive	14.12	12
2	Somewhat supportive	21.18	18
3	Neutral	55.29	47
4	Somewhat unsupportive	7.06	6
5	Very unsupportive	2.35	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>

Q5 - In your experience, how many teachers or other school staff are supportive of sexual minority youth in the schools that your organization served?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	None	3.53	3.53
2	1	4.71	4
3	Between 2 and 5	14.12	12
4	Between 6 and 10	20.00	17
5	More than 10	57.65	49
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>

Q6 - Did the schools your organization served have a policy about bullying, harassment or assault in school before working with your organization?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	85.88	73
2	No	14.12	12
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>

Q7 - Do the schools served demonstrate an interest in developing policy further to support sexual minority youth?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	37.65	32
2	No	62.35	53
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>

Q8 - Does the state in which the school is located that your organization served have official policies to support sexual minority youth?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	88.24	75
2	No	11.76	10

<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>
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## Appendix C: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctor of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### Explanations:

#### *What does “fraudulent” mean?*

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### *What is “unauthorized” assistance?*

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

### **Appendix C: Statement of Original Work (continued)**

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

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Date: August 9, 2018