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School psychologists' knowledge of and attitudes towards transgender students

Arielle Walzer

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' KNOWLEDGE OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARD TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

by

Arielle J. Walzer

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Dedication

To L.H. & T.K., who reject academia but influenced it anyway.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Dr. Terri Allen for her invaluable guidance throughout the research process.

Abstract

Arielle J. Walzer
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Terri Allen, Ph.D.
Master of Arts in School Psychology

Transgender students face harassment and discrimination in schools, and those who experience such maltreatment are at a higher risk of attempting suicide and other negative outcomes. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has called upon school psychologists to be advocates for transgender students, yet school psychologists receive little or no training in this area. The Knowledge of and Attitudes Toward Transgender Students Survey was created and distributed to members of the New Jersey, Connecticut, Delaware, and Maryland state associations for school psychologists. Although previous studies suggest that a person's attitude toward transgender people is affected by age and gender, no significant differences in scores on the survey were found between different age groups and genders. Scores for those who said they were familiar with NASP's position on transgender students were significantly higher than those who were not familiar with it. Implications and future directions for research are discussed.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents (Continued)

List of Figures

Figure Page

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Introduction

Need for Study

Transgender students are an at-risk group in schools. According to the 2011 National School Climate Survey by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), a comprehensive survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth, 80.0% of transgender students reported feeling unsafe in school because of their gender identity or expression (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012). In school in the past year, 75.4% had experienced verbal harassment (e.g., called names or threatened), 32.1% had experienced physical harassment (e.g., pushed or shoved), and 16.8% had experienced physical assault (e.g., punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon) because of their gender identity or expression (Kosciw et al., 2012).

Mistreatment at school due to gender identity or expression is associated with lower levels of educational attainment (Grant et al., 2011). Fifteen percent of respondents in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey left school due to harassment and assault (Grant et al., 2011).

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has expressed its support for transgender students and requires school psychologists to ensure their safety in schools. NASP's *Principles for Professional Ethics* (2010a) mentions transgender students in Standard I.2.6, Standard II.1.2, and Principle I.3, requiring practitioners to pursue knowledge and understanding of transgender students' needs to provide effective services, and to promote an atmosphere of fairness and justice.

In a 2014 statement, NASP reaffirmed this position, and called upon school psychologists to be advocates for the civil rights of transgender students and staff. It suggests many ways to do this, such as advocating for gender-neutral spaces, providing counseling to transgender students, contributing to research on transgender issues, responding to bullying and harassment, and modeling acceptance and respect (NASP, 2014).

Purpose

It is unclear if school psychologists can meet NASP's standards, because there is little research on the subject. The purpose of this study is to see whether or not school psychologists are prepared for the unique challenges of working with transgender students. School psychologists will complete a survey designed to assess their knowledge of and attitudes towards transgender students.

Hypothesis One

There is a difference in school psychologists' knowledge of and attitudes towards transgender students based on the school psychologists' gender. In a study of over 2,000 heterosexual American adults, men expressed significantly less favorable attitudes toward transgender people than did women, even when controlling for other factors such as race, level of education, and place of residence (Norton & Herek, 2013). Previous studies have similarly demonstrated that men have more negative views of transgender people (Antoszewski, Kasielska, Jędrzejczak, & Kruk-Jeromin, 2007; Nagoshi et al., 2008). Furthermore, more transgender youth reported that their father's reaction to their coming out as transgender was "negative or very negative" than reported that about their mothers (Grossman, D'augelli, & Frank, 2010).

Hypothesis Two

There is a difference in school psychologists' knowledge of and attitudes towards transgender students based on the school psychologists' age. Attitudes towards transgender people are different than attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, but they are related (Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Norton & Herek, 2013). In a 2009 meta-analysis on support for gay rights, Lax and Phillips found that support for same-sex marriage correlated with age. Those in the 18-29 bracket were most likely to support same-sex marriage, followed by those in 30-44 age bracket, followed by 45-64, and then 64+.

Hypothesis Three

There is a difference in school psychologists' knowledge of and attitudes towards transgender students based on their familiarity with NASP's position on transgender students. NASP has engaged in numerous efforts to educate its members about appropriate treatment of transgender students, including hosting workshops, publishing articles in their newsletter, and providing online resources, and NASP published a formal position statement on transgender students in their May 2014 newsletter. Professional associations play an important role in educating members about new ideas, and promoting change in members' behavior (Swan & Newell, 1995; Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002; Parada, Nordqvist, & Gimeno, 2010).

Operational Definitions

This study uses the following definitions, adapted from NASP (2014) and National Center for Transgender Equality (2014) definitions:

Cisgender. Refers to people whose gender identity, expression, and/or behavior matches their assigned sex at birth. The opposite of *transgender*.

Gender identity. A person's internal sense of being female, male, or something different. It is not necessarily visible to others.

Gender expression. How a person expresses their gender identity to others, often through clothing, hairstyles, voice, body characteristics, and behavior.

Transgender. Refers to people whose gender identity, expression, and/or behavior is different from what is culturally expected based on their assigned sex at birth. A broad, umbrella term that includes diverse gender identities such as transgender man, transgender woman, genderqueer, bi-gender, two-spirit, and other terms.

Assumptions

One assumption is that respondents to the survey answered honestly. Because the survey was conducted online, with no face-to-face interaction, and did not collect any personal identifiers, respondents should be less likely to lie to make themselves look better.

Another assumption is that the survey is valid and accurately assesses school psychologists' knowledge and attitudes on this subject.

Limitations

This study may have limited external validity because the participants were not pulled from a random sample. Rather, only school psychologists who are members of certain states' professional organizations were contacted about participating. Furthermore, school psychologists who already have greater knowledge of transgender

issues or who have more positive attitudes toward transgender students may have been more likely to complete the survey.

Summary

NASP standards require school psychologists to be knowledgeable, understanding, and competent when dealing with transgender students. However, there is no evidence that school psychologists meet this standard. This study investigates the issue.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The term *transgender* refers to "people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth" (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2014). It is an umbrella term that includes many more specific identities, such as transgender man, transgender woman, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, and non-binary, etc. *Cisgender* is the opposite of transgender; it refers to someone whose "sex assigned at birth matches current gender identity" (NASP, 2014).

It is difficult to estimate the number of transgender and gender nonconforming students in the United States (Meier & Labuski, 2013). One estimate is that 0.3% of the adult population identifies as transgender (Gates, 2011).

Transgender people face discrimination because of their gender identities and/or gender expression. The results of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, a survey of over 6,000 transgender people, demonstrated a variety of severe consequences of this discrimination (Grant et al., 2011). Survey respondents were four times as likely than the general population to be living in poverty, and two times as likely to be unemployed. Ninety percent reported that they had been harassed at work, and more than a quarter (26%) had been fired because of their gender identity or expression. Nearly one-fifth (19%) had been refused housing, and the same percentage had been homeless at some point in their lives. More than half (55%) of these respondents had been harassed at a homeless shelter, while 22% had been sexually assaulted at a shelter, and 29% had been turned away from a shelter due to their gender identity or expression. Almost 2% of

respondents were homeless at the time of the survey, nearly twice the national homelessness rate. More than half (57%) had experienced "significant family rejection" due to their gender (Grant et al., 2011).

Transgender people typically become aware that their gender identity does not match their assigned sex at birth during childhood. The average for this realization was 7.5 in one study and 10.4 in another (Grossman, D'augelli, & Frank, 2010; Grossman & D'augelli, 2006). In a different study, most transgender participants recalled becoming aware of their non-normative gender identity during early childhood, along with a general sense of being "different" (Nagoshi, Nagoshi, Peterson, & Terrell, 2015). While gender identity may evolve over time in a minority of young children, feelings that gender identity does not match assigned sex that persist into the early stages of puberty are unlikely to change (Kon, 2014).

Conflation with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students

Since gender identity and sexual orientation are independent of each other, transgender individuals, like cisgender individuals, may be of any sexual orientation (Meier & Labuksi, 2013; Grossman & D'augelli, 2006). Some identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, asexual, or any other orientation, but researchers often group transgender students with lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students. A transgender student, whether heterosexual or LGB, faces different discrimination based on gender identity than a cisgender student faces based on sexual orientation. Transgender people are generally more discriminated against than lesbian and gay people (Grossman & D'augelli, 2006). When studies combine transgender and LGB youth in one category, it is impossible to see which effects are a result of sexual orientation and which are a result of

gender identity. Therefore, the conflation of these two separate, but sometimes overlapping identities presents a problem.

Some research ignores the differences. McCabe and Rubinson (2008) incorrectly claim in their literature review that Savage, Prout, and Chard (2004) studied school psychologists' knowledge about LGBT students, when in fact they only studied lesbian and gay students. In McCabe and Rubinson's study, transgender students are mentioned in the title and in the repeated use of the acronym LGBT, but all of the focus group questions refer to gay and lesbian students.

School Safety

Transgender and gender nonconforming students often experience verbal and physical harassment at school due to their gender identity and expression. According to one study of transgender youth, "attending school was reported to be the most traumatic aspect of growing up" (Grossman & D'augelli, 2006, p.122). Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz (2009) reported findings from a 2006-2007 survey of LGBT students specific to transgender youth. About two-thirds (65%) of transgender youth reported feeling unsafe in school because of their gender expression. The vast majority (90%) heard negative remarks about someone's gender expression, from fellow students and from staff members.

In most cases, staff ignores or mishandles transphobic incidents. Only 11% of students reported that staff intervened "most of the time or always" when hearing negative remarks about gender expression. Incidences of transphobic harassment are underreported; about half of the students (54%) did not report incidents to school

authorities. Of those who did report, only 33% believes that the school handled the situation properly (Greytak et al., 2009).

Unsafe school environments lead to negative academic outcomes for transgender students. Due to fear for their safety, 47% of transgender students reported skipping class at least once in the past month, 46% an entire day of school. These numbers indicate a higher frequency of truancy for students missing because of safety concerns due to transphobia than safety concerns due to other factors (Greytak et al., 2009). Students who face high levels of harassment due to gender expression have lower grade point averages (GPA) and are less likely to plan on attending college.

The National Transgender Discrimination Survey, a survey of over 6,000 transgender people, had similar results. More than three-quarters (78%) of respondents reported that they had been harassed in school, 35% reported that they had been physically assaulted in school, and 12% had experienced sexual violence in school (Grant et al., 2011). Some of this had come from teachers and staff members; 31% had been verbally harassed, 5% physically assaulted, and 3% sexually assaulted by teachers or staff members.

Six percent of respondents had been expelled from school due to their gender identity or expression, while 15% chose to leave school because of their mistreatment (Grant et al., 2011). Nearly half (48%) of those who left school because of mistreatment experienced homelessness. They were twice as likely to have engaged in sex work, and had an HIV rate eight times higher than their peers (Grant et al., 2011).

Health Outcomes

Depression. Compared to heterosexual and cisgender youth, LGBT youth score higher on scales of depression symptoms, and are more likely to engage in self-harm (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009).

Suicide. Transgender youth are at a heightened risk for suicide and life-threatening behaviors (Almeida et al., 2009). In a study of 55 transgender youth between the ages of 15 and 21, Grossman and D'augelli (2007) found that 45% of their sample had seriously considered taking their own lives, and 26% had actually made a suicide attempt. All those who had made a suicide attempt reported that at least one of their attempts was related to being transgender.

In the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, 41% of transgender respondents reported having made a suicide attempt, compared to 1.6% of the general population, a 25-fold difference (Grant et al., 2011). The percentage was higher (51%) for those who had experienced harassment or assault in school (Grant et al., 2011).

Physical health. In focus groups with transgender youth ages 15-20, almost all participants mentioned difficulties with healthcare. They reported a fear of discrimination from healthcare providers and a lack of resources specific to their needs as transgender people (Grossman & D'augelli, 2006). Because many had been kicked out of their homes, many youth reported having turned to prostitution to support themselves. Due to this and high rates of sexual assault, transgender youth have a higher risk for HIV and other STIs (Grossman & D'augelli, 2006).

Later outcomes. Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, and Russell (2010) found that school victimization of gender nonconforming youth is related to negative psychosocial

outcomes in early adulthood. The authors studied LGBT young adults, ages 21-25, all of whom self-reported some level of gender nonconformity in adolescence, regardless of whether or not they identified as transgender. Higher levels of school victimization based on gender expression were associated with lower levels of life satisfaction and higher levels of depression in young adulthood. School victimization based on gender expression mediated the pathway between adolescent gender nonconformity and depression and lower life satisfaction; gender nonconformity alone did not predict these outcomes. School victimization for other reasons did not mediate the pathway (Toomey et al., 2010).

Legal Protections

Currently, 17 states (Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington) and Washington, D.C., have laws that explicitly protect transgender students from discrimination, bullying, harassment and/or violence based on gender identity and expression (ACLU & GLSEN).

The federal law Title IX prohibits discrimination based on sex in federally funded education programs. A 2014 report from the Department of Education explicitly stated that protection extends to transgender students (U.S. D.O.E., 2014).

Role of School Psychologists

School-wide safety programs. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) aims to create schools free from "bullying, discrimination, harassment, aggression, violence, and abuse" (Rossen & Cowan, 2012, p.1). To create effective school- and district-wide safety and bullying prevention programs, school psychologists

are encouraged to (a) create and serve on school safety teams, (b) design and provide professional development for school staff, (c) clearly define appropriate school behavior, and (d) create guidelines for investigating and responding to bullying and other threats to student safety (Rossen & Cowan, 2012).

School-wide safety programs have been shown to be more effective at promoting a positive school climate than interventions targeted at bullies and victims (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). However, they are still much less effective than desired, possibly due to their failure to account for specific social and demographic factors related to bullying, such as gender identity (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). Much more research has been done on types of bullying than on the social-ecological influences of bullying (Swearer, 2010). Swearer (2010) argued that school-wide safety programs are not enough to change the pervasive culture of discrimination against LGBTQ students that maintains a dangerous school climate.

Transgender-specific programs. The National Association of School Psychologists affirms the rights of transgender people, and calls upon school psychologists to be supportive of transgender students, staff, and parents (NASP, 2014). NASP requires school psychologists to be advocates for transgender people by (a) advocating for gender-neutral spaces, (b) providing staff training on transgender issues, (c) providing counseling to transgender students, (d) seeking out additional training on transgender issues, (e) avoiding gender stereotypes, and (f) responding to bullying (NASP, 2014).

In addition to addressing the specific needs of transgender students within a school-wide anti-bullying program, another way that school psychologists can improve

the safety of transgender students is by working on developing transgender-inclusive curricula. A curriculum that is transgender-inclusive is one that includes information about important current and historical events relevant to transgender people, and recognizes the contribution of transgender people to our society. All students (regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation) in schools with LGBT-inclusive curricula report less frequent harassment than their peers at school without LGBT-inclusive curricula (Russell, Kostroski, McGuire, Laub, & Manke, 2006). LGBT students also report feeling safer at these schools. Transgender youth report that they have greater access to knowledge about lesbian, gay, and bisexual people than about transgender people (Grossman & D'augelli, 2006).

Barriers. Despite NASP's position, school psychologists may not have adequate knowledge to be advocates for transgender students. Although there is a push for school psychologists to challenge biases and advocate for students who are affected by prejudice, there is not enough research about how this might be accomplished (Rogers & O'Bryon, 2008).

McCabe and Rubinson (2008) found that graduate students in education, including teaching, school counseling, and school psychology programs, had inadequate knowledge of LGBT issues, and the majority "lacked a positive and proactive attitude toward improving the school environment for LGBT youth" (p.479).

Savage, Prout, and Chard (2004) studied school psychologists' attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about gay male and lesbian students. They found that while participants expressed relatively positive attitudes towards these students, they had low-to-moderate knowledge about issues affecting them, and were unprepared to deal with them. Just 15%

reported having any training in graduate school about lesbian and gay male issues. This is worth noting in relation to transgender students since they are often grouped with lesbian and gay students in training, and because attitudes towards transgender people are correlated with attitudes towards lesbian and gay people (Grossman & D'augelli, 2006; Hill & Willoughby, 2005).

Role of NASP

The diffusion of new ideas within a profession – in this case, support for transgender students rather than scorn, indifference, or attempts to "correct" their gender identity – is often accomplished through professional associations (Swan & Newell, 1995). Professional associations play a key role in theorizing and legitimizing changes in values and ideas (Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002; Parada, Nordqvist, & Gimeno, 2010).

In the case of school psychologists, NASP is the most prominent national professional association. The organization publishes guidelines for responsible practice, approves university training programs, and issues a national credential for school psychologists (NASP 2010a, NASP 2010b). According to a 2008 telephone survey of school psychologists in public schools, about 57% of practicing school psychologists are members of NASP (Lewis, Truscott, & Volker, 2008).

NASP published a position statement entitled, "Safe Schools for Transgender and Gender Diverse Students" in the May 2014 issue of Communiqué, NASP's newsletter, which seeks to keep members informed about "current issues and practices relevant to the profession" (NASP, n.d.). It had previously released position statements on LGBTQ youth as a whole. NASP also provides a list of resources on working with transgender

students on its website, has published additional articles about transgender students in Communiqué and on the website, and hosted a workshop entitled, "Helping Transgender Students Succeed at School and at Home" at its 2015 Annual Convention.

Attitudes Toward Transgender People

There has been little research on cisgender people's attitudes toward transgender people, but certain characteristics have been suggested to affect the likelihood that cisgender people will express positive attitudes toward transgender people.

Gender differences. Women have been shown to have more positive attitudes toward transgender people than men, even when controlling for other factors such as level of education, race, and place of residence (Norton & Herek, 2013; Antoszewski, Kasielska, Jędrzejczak, & Kruk-Jeromin, 2007; Nagoshi et al., 2008). Transgender youth also describe their fathers' reactions to their coming out as transgender as "negative or very negative" more often than they describe their mothers' reactions that way (Grossman, D'augelli, & Frank, 2010).

Age differences. A meta-analysis of support for gay rights found that support for same-sex marriage was highest among those in the lowest age bracket, age 18-29, and decreased with age (Lax & Phillips, 2009). Attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual people correlate with attitudes toward transgender people, so we can infer a similar pattern of support and acceptance of transgender people that decreases as ages rise (Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Norton & Herek, 2013).

Chapter 3

Methodology

Participants

The target population was certified school psychologists who were practicing in a school setting at any grade level, preK-12th grade. Respondents were part of the database of contacts, either as members or affiliates, of four different state school psychologist associations in the Northeast region: New Jersey, Delaware, Connecticut, and Maryland. To be included in the study, respondents needed to sign the informed consent. Respondents did not receive any incentive or compensation for their participation in the study.

In three of the states, respondents were sent an invitation to participate with a link to the online survey via direct email, while in the fourth state, an invitation and link was included in an email newsletter. There is no way to identify the exact number of people who saw the link. One hundred and fifty-three people filled out a portion of the demographic information, and 121 completed the survey, for a completion rate of 79.1%.

Because participation was voluntary, with participation solicited via the state school psychologist associations, the respondents to the survey can be considered a convenience sample. Thus the individuals who responded to the survey are likely to be characteristic of school psychologists affiliated with other state associations across the region, but may not be representative of school psychologists in other regions of the United States.

All respondents who met the inclusion criteria and completed the entire survey were included in the analysis. Table 1 displays respondents' demographic information.

Table 1

Respondent Characteristics

Variable	*n*	%
Gender		
Female	99	81.8
Male	22	18.2
Transgender?		
Yes	0	0.0
No	121	100.0
Age Group		
21-25	3	2.5
26-30	32	26.4
31-35	12	9.9
36-40	15	12.4
41-45	11	9.1
46-50	7	5.8
51-55	12	9.9
56-60	12	9.9
61-65	14	11.6
66+	3	2.5
Work Location		
Connecticut	13	10.7
Delaware	12	9.9
Washington, D.C.	1	.8
Florida	1	.8
Maryland	2	1.7
New Jersey	87	71.9
New York	1	.8
Pennsylvania	4	3.3
Community Setting		
Urban	32	26.4
Suburban	80	66.1
Rural	9	7.4
School Type		
Preschool	45	37.2
Elementary school	69	57.0
Middle school	47	38.8
High school	36	29.8

Table 1 (continued)

Respondent Characteristics

Variable	*n*	%
Other setting	16	13.2

Note. Totals for school type do not add to 100% because respondents could select more than one option.

Materials

A pool of 30 statements related to transgender students was created based on the review of literature on transgender students, as well as conversations with transgender young adults about their experiences in school. Guidelines for survey research from Vissner, Krosnick, and Lavrakas (2000), Lavrakas (2008), and Leedy and Ormrod (2012) were consulted. A school psychologist and 10 school psychology graduate students reviewed the items, made suggestions for minor rewording for clarity, and confirmed the items' appropriateness for inclusion.

Twenty items were selected to create the Knowledge of and Attitudes Toward Transgender Students Survey (KATTSS). The internal consistency of the KATTSS, calculated using Cronbach's alpha, was found to be good, $\alpha = .782$. At the item level, the preliminary analysis included running descriptive statistics of all items contained in the survey. The KATTSS' twenty statements about transgender students were presented with the instructions, "Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements." This was scored on a five-point Likert scale, where 0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = neither agree nor disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree.

See appendix for the complete survey.

There were also six multiple-choice demographic questions about age, location, gender, and school setting, and an optional open-ended "do you have any additional comments?" question at the end of the survey.

Procedure

Leaders of state organizations for school psychologists were contacted and provided with information about the study and the link to the survey. The New Jersey Association of School Psychologists, the Delaware Association of School Psychologists, and the Connecticut Association of School Psychologists sent emails to their members requesting their participation. The Maryland School Psychologists' Association included a link in an emailed newsletter.

By clicking on the link, the respondents arrived at the survey on qualtrics.com. They answered six multiple-choice questions about demographics and background information, and then completed the KATTSS, indicating their level of agreement with 20 statements scored on a five-point Likert scale. A final open-ended question allowed for any additional comments.

Design

The analysis was completed using SPSS for Windows 21. The significance or alpha level for all analyses was .05. Respondents' total scores on the survey were calculated by adding together their responses on each item. Statements that indicated a negative attitude toward or lack of knowledge about transgender students were reverse-coded. A score of 0 would indicate an extremely low level of knowledge about transgender students and highly negative attitudes toward them, while a score of 80 would indicate an extremely high level of knowledge and highly positive attitudes. A score of 40 would indicate mixed knowledge, mixed attitudes, no opinion, or an unwillingness to

answer (selecting "neither agree nor disagree" for every statement).

Hypothesis One. There is a difference in school psychologists' knowledge of and attitudes towards transgender students based on the school psychologists' gender.

Levene's test was performed to test for equality of variances. With equal variance assumed, an independent-samples t test was conducted to compare the means of scores for each gender group.

Hypothesis Two. There is a difference in school psychologists' knowledge of and attitudes towards transgender students based on the school psychologists' age.

Levene's test was performed to for equality of variances. Equal variance between age groups was not assumed and a Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to compare the means of scores for each age group.

Hypothesis Three. There is a difference in school psychologists' knowledge of and attitudes towards transgender students based on their familiarity with NASP's position on transgender students.

The independent variable was the respondents' level of familiarity with NASP's position on transgender students, as indicated in their response to item 3, and the dependent variable was their total score with response to that item removed. A one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to compare the means of scores for each resulting group.

Chapter 4

Results

The overall mean total score on the Knowledge of and Attitudes Toward Transgender Students Survey (KATTSS) was 50.10 (SD = 8.19).

Hypothesis One

The hypothesis that there is a difference in school psychologists' knowledge of and attitudes towards transgender students based on the school psychologists' gender was not supported.

Although demographic data showed that more women than men participated in the survey, Levene's test indicated that the variances were not significantly different, $F(119) = 3.17$, $p = .078$. To test the effect of gender on KATTSS score, the mean score for females (M = 49.82, SD = 8.53) was compared to the mean score for males (M = 51.36, SD = 6.46) with an independent samples t test. There was not a significant difference, $t(119) = -.800$, $p = .078$.

Hypothesis Two

The hypothesis that there is a difference in school psychologists' knowledge of and attitudes towards transgender students based on the school psychologists' age was not supported.

Levene's test indicated that the variances between age groups were significantly different, $F(9) = 2.25$, $p = .024$. A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to evaluate differences between age groups on the total mean score and found no significant effect, $\chi^2(9) = 8.098$, $p = .524$.

Hypothesis Three

The hypothesis that there is a difference in school psychologists' knowledge of and attitudes towards transgender students based on their familiarity with NASP's position on transgender students was supported.

To test the effect of level of familiarity with NASP's position on transgender students, respondents were split into groups based on their reaction to the statement: "I am familiar with NASP's position on transgender students" and this item was removed from the total score. A one-way between groups ANOVA revealed a significant difference between the resulting groups, $F(4) = 7.77$, $p = .000$. Figure 1 displays the means of each group.

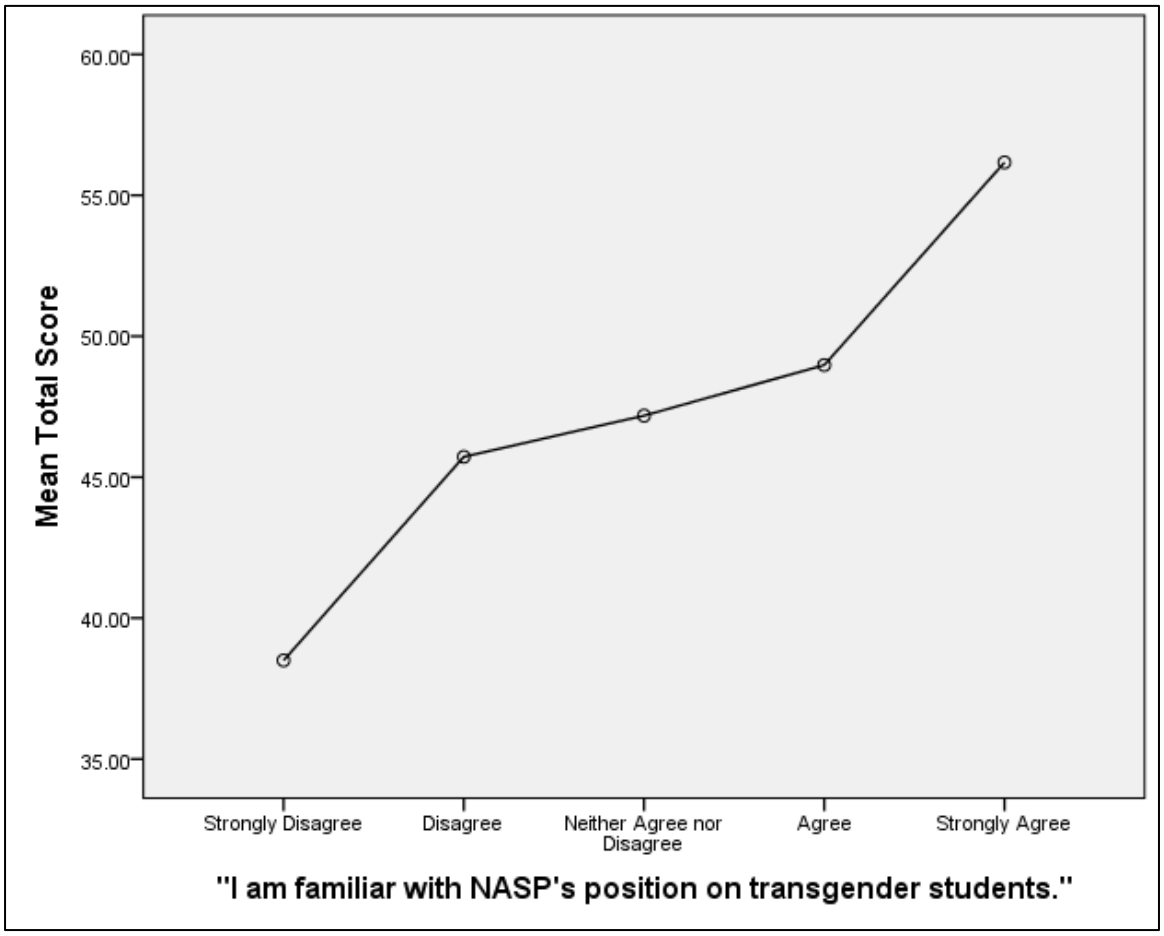

Figure 1. Differences in mean total scores grouped by answers to "I am familiar with NASP's position on transgender students". This statement was removed from the total score. $p < .01$

Chapter 5

Discussion

Hypothesis One

There was no significant difference between the mean total score for men and the mean total score for women, despite previous research suggesting that men have significantly less favorable attitudes toward transgender people than women. One possible explanation for this is the small number of men in the sample – just 22 men compared to 99 women. The men's sample might have been too small to accurately represent the range of attitudes and knowledge levels in the total population.

Another possibility is that men and women who are school psychologists are more similar on this issue than are men and women in previously studied populations.

Hypothesis Two

There was no significant difference between the mean total scores for different age groups. This is likely due to the very small amount of respondents per age group. Three of the 10 groups had fewer than 8 respondents, and only one had greater than 15 respondents. Drawing conclusions from such small groups is difficult and likely inaccurate.

Respondents indicated their age groups on the survey rather than inputting their exact ages due to concerns that they might be hesitant to share that information. Had their exact ages been given, a correlational analysis might have yielded more useful information, since the data would not have been split into such small groups.

Additionally, attitudes toward transgender people seem to be rapidly changing. The study that indicated the possibility of an age difference in attitudes was published in

2009 using data collected earlier, while this study was conducted in early 2015. The visibility of transgender people has risen significantly during the intervening years, with transgender characters appearing on mainstream television and transgender rights being addressed in the mass media. This might have led to a change in attitudes and knowledge among older people, who could have been largely unaware of transgender issues prior to their entry into the traditional media.

Hypothesis Three

There was a significant difference in total score based on level of familiarity with NASP's position on transgender students, with scores on the KATTSS rising as familiarity increased.

Respondents who indicated that they were familiar with NASP's position on transgender students may have been those who already had more knowledge of transgender students and more positive attitudes toward them. However, this may not account for the all of the difference in scores.

A bolder interpretation of this finding is that NASP's efforts to educate its members on this topic have been successful. To improve the situation of transgender students, NASP should continue its attempts to educate its members on the needs and rights of this population.

Limitations

Sample characteristics. The small size of the sample is a limitation, as is the limited range of locations from which the sample was drawn. Over 70% of respondents worked in New Jersey, and most of the others worked in neighboring or nearby states.

The results therefore cannot be generalized to school psychologists working in other regions.

Self-report bias. Another limitation is self-report bias, particularly social desirability bias. Social desirability bias refers to the tendency of people to deny socially undesirable qualities and claim socially desirable ones (Phillips & Clancy, 1972). As the field of school psychology places an emphasis on social justice and acceptance of differences, respondents to this survey were likely to view items such as "I feel comfortable around people who are openly transgender" or "I am willing to be the advisor for a student group for transgender students" as reflecting socially desirable characteristics.

To combat this, 9 of the 20 statements did not include the word "I" or any reference to the respondent, distancing the respondent from the attitudes or qualities implied by the statements (e.g., "Schools should not split up classes based on gender"). Additionally, the survey was administered entirely online and did not collect identifying information, reducing the impact of the social desirability bias (Nederhof, 1985).

Future Directions

This study established a survey, the Knowledge of and Attitudes Toward Transgender Students Survey (KATTSS), with good internal consistency ($\alpha = .782$) that can be used in future research on the topic. The internal consistency of the survey could be improved upon and brought to the $\alpha > .8$ level. Focus groups with school psychologists should be conducted to assess how they interpret the items.

Although it did not appear to affect results, the wording of statement 20, "I am against dress codes that discriminate based on gender (e.g., only girls can wear dresses)"

should be changed to eliminate the word “discriminate”, which is emotionally charged. It should instead use the neutral word “differentiate”. Future studies should check that this change does not affect reliability or validity.

To expand this study’s generalizability, respondents should come from a wider geographic area. States outside the Northeast should be included.

The KATTSS can easily be adapted to apply to professionals working in schools other than school psychologists. Educators and administrators also play a role in the safety of transgender students in schools, and future studies could compare their scores on the KATTSS to those of school psychologists.

Accurate information on school psychologists’ knowledge of and attitudes toward transgender students could eventually be used to guide efforts in educating school psychologists, thereby improving the safety of transgender students in schools.

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Appendix

Knowledge of and Attitudes Toward Transgender Students Survey

These statements were presented to respondents with the instructions, “Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.” Options were Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree, which were coded on a scale of 0-4, respectively. Items with an asterisk were reverse-coded.

1. I am willing to be the advisor for a student group for transgender students.
2. It is important to always refer to students by their legal names.*
3. I am familiar with NASP's position on transgender students.
4. I would encourage a student assigned female at birth who identifies as male to act in more feminine ways.*
5. I am familiar with gender-neutral pronouns (e.g., singular they, xe, hir, etc.).
6. A student who identifies as male but was assigned female at birth should play on girls' sports teams.*
7. I am familiar with my district's policies for transgender students.
8. All transgender students want to pass as either male or female.*
9. I would affirm the gender identity of any student.
10. I do not have enough training to adequately counsel a transgender student.*
11. Parents have the right to be informed if their child is transgender.*
12. I feel prepared to work with transgender students.
13. Being transgender is a psychological disorder.*
14. Staff should always intervene when overhearing derogatory remarks about someone's gender expression (e.g., "he's too girly").
15. I feel comfortable around people who are openly transgender.
16. I feel uncomfortable when someone's gender identity is not clear to me.*
17. A student who identifies as female but was assigned male at birth should change in the girls' locker room.
18. Schools should not split up classes based on gender.
19. Transgender students are almost always lesbian, gay, or bisexual.*
20. I am against dress codes that discriminate based on gender (e.g., only girls can wear dresses).