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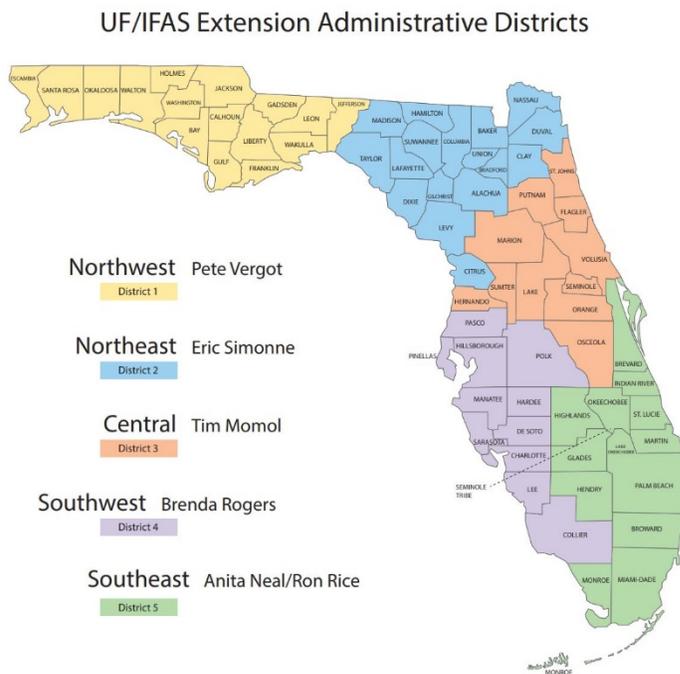
Master's Project

Understanding the Experiences and Needs of 4-H Extension Faculty members Working with the  
LGBTQ+ Community

## Introduction

Florida 4-H serves as one of the state’s largest youth development organizations, reaching more than 200,000 Florida youth annually (*Florida, 2018*). These youth practice life skill development through a variety of project undertakings, guided by the Experiential Learning Model, and embodied in the 4-H motto, “Learn By Doing.” This model thrives by teaming Florida’s youth with positive, caring, adult volunteer partners and 4-H faculty and staff, to provide learning and engagement opportunities that allow the youth to take an active role in their learning, reflect on the things that they have learned through the process, and find ways to apply those lessons in their life beyond the 4-H experience. Florida 4-H is housed within the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS). UF/IFAS is divided into five geographic districts, as depicted in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: UF/IFAS Extension Geographic Districts**



Nationwide, 4-H operates within the larger service known as “Cooperative Extension.” According to the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences’ (UF/IFAS) website, “Extension is a partnership between state, federal, and county governments to provide scientific knowledge and expertise to the public” (*Who We Are, 2018*). Thanks to The Smith-

Lever Act of 1914, 4-H became the arm of Extension to provide youth development knowledge and expertise to communities throughout the United States (*History*, 2013).

Creating an effective and healthy partnership between youth and adults can foster even greater positive youth development outcomes. Zeldin, Christens, & Powers (2013) define a youth-adult partnership as “Youth-adult partnership is the practice of: (a) multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together, (b) in a collective [democratic] fashion (c) over a sustained period of time, (d) through shared work, (e) intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or affirmatively address a community issue (p. 388).” Research has shown that youth who participate in programs that feature youth-adult partnerships demonstrate greater sociopolitical empowerment and sense of community, (Ramey, Lawford, Rose-Krasnor, Freeman, & Lanctot, 2018).

Florida 4-H prides itself on being an open and inclusive youth development organization, welcoming participants of all races, genders, nationalities, sexual orientations, and religious affiliations with open arms (*4-H Policies & Best Management Practices*, 2019). All Florida youth are welcomed and encouraged to participate and succeed in the Florida 4-H organization. Under the guidance of positive adult volunteer leaders and caring 4-H Extension faculty and staff, Florida 4-H strives to establish a sense of belonging among all who participate.

The 4-H youth development program is founded on the Essential Elements of 4-H, a set of positive youth development facets that compile “traditional and applied research characteristics” to help 4-H volunteers and professionals provide a well-rounded educational experience to youth participants (Samuel & Rose, 2011). In total there are eight identified Essential Elements that are often categorized into four main subheadings: Belonging, Independence, Generosity, and Mastery. In focusing on the idea of Belonging, the Essential Elements identify “Positive Relationship with Caring Adult, Safe Environment, and Inclusive Environment,” as being essential to positive youth development (Samuel & Rose, 2011).

Youth members of this demographic that are exposed to a youth development program or organization are more likely to take an active role within their communities. Ramey et al. (2018) demonstrates that LGBTQ youth that “were involved in youth development programs experienced higher levels of at least some forms of community engagement”. By ensuring that youth development professionals are equipped with the skills, information, and resources to establish stronger youth-adult partnerships with LGBTQ youth, it stands to reason that these two youth development trends would greatly benefit by working strongly together.

### **Significance**

Youth rely on the adults in their lives for education, coaching, and guidance as they make their way toward adulthood and independence. As youth mature, they seek to develop a sense of personal identity, and it is crucial to provide them with chances to develop that identity with freedom and positivity (Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010). In order to receive adequate and effective help in those areas, youth need to trust the adults that surround them, and those adults need to demonstrate acceptance and a level of understanding for the youth in their care (Richards-Schuster & Timmermans, 2017; Wong et al., 2010).

The level of diversity within the Florida 4-H organization is a welcome sight; however, it does bring with it the challenge of managing a variety of cultural and social paradigms and creating a sense of understanding and readiness among Extension's workforce. Little research exists within Extension regarding youth development professionals working and engaging with members of the LGBTQ community.

By evaluating the needs of the youth development professionals in Florida 4-H in how best to work and communicate with youth of the LGBTQ community, Florida 4-H can increase its effectiveness in reaching a community that has already demonstrated a trend of active civic engagement, when engaged by the youth development field.

### **Literature Review**

Existing literature on the needs or available trainings for professionals who work with this community are also lacking. Searches in publication databases, including *Journal of Extension*, *Journal of Agricultural Education*, *Journal of Youth Development*, & *Journal of Human Sciences & Extension* yielded no relevant results. A number of articles related to mental health resources and availability for LGBTQ youth were listed; however, resources and training opportunities for youth development professionals working within the 4-H, Extension, and agriculture community were absent.

There exists a body of research outside of Cooperative Extension to demonstrate the need and significance of providing educators with the tools to engage the LGBTQ youth community more effectively. As noted above, Ramey et al. (2018) demonstrated that LGBTQ youth active within a youth development organization with youth-adult partnerships were more likely to be civically engaged in their communities. This is aligned with the overall effectiveness of 4-H in building and developing civically engaged youth, to the tune of 4-Hers being four-times more likely to contribute to their communities and twice as likely to be civically active (Lerner, Lerner, & Phelps, 2008).

In terms of the youth-adult partnership (Y-AP), much research has been done to define what an effective Y-AP is and how it stands to benefit the development of youth in its practice. Zeldin, Christens, and Powers (2013) developed a working definition of Y-APs and outlined how they empower young people to take a vested interest in their organizations and communities. Y-APs also stand to contribute to the benefit of the adults in the partnership as well (Zeldin et al., 2013). Youth voices and opinions can be used to strengthen the positions of adult participants within organizations, and their insights can be used to benefit the missions of a variety of groups and organizations (Zeldin, et al., 2013).

In further examining the effect of such a Y-AP on the LGBTQ youth, it is helpful to examine the outlook from the perspective of LGBTQ adults. 4-H still exists as a highly agricultural organization. Leslie (2017) explained the nuances of agricultural life and subsistence for the LGBTQ farmer, notably how the sustainable LGBTQ farmer feels largely left behind in the movements for both industrial agricultural gain and the mainstream LGBTQ movement for marriage equality. Leslie also described that heteronormative relationships have formed the

foundation for agricultural gain for much of modern farming history, and how those not interested in establishing a heteronormative marriage must navigate a different course to effective land ownership and management, as well as community relationships and socio-cultural paradigms (2017). By better equipping youth development professionals, particularly in 4-H, to welcome and encourage LGBTQ youth in the agricultural fields, the movements for sustainable agriculture and LGBTQ acceptance can be brought together more effectively.

The ability for 4-H faculty members to effectively navigate the diverse landscape of stakeholders and their needs can be looked at through the lens of the path-goal theory of leadership, on which there is extensive literature. Robert House espoused this theory in 1971 and offered further insight on it in 1996 (House, 1996). The path-goal theory of leadership explains that formally appointed superiors play key roles in providing incentives for their subordinates to achieve their goals in their job functions, specifically through the following fundamental underlying notion: "...individuals in positions of authority, superiors, will be effective to the extent that they complement the environment in which their subordinates work by providing the necessary cognitive clarifications to ensure that subordinates expect that they can attain work goals and that they will experience intrinsic satisfaction and receive valent [sic] rewards as a result of work goal attainment" (House, 1996). He continues, "...to the extent that subordinates lack support or resources required to accomplish work goals, it is the leaders function to provide such support and resources" (House, 1996). Employees essentially look to their superiors for clarity in their job functions in order to achieve satisfaction in the completion of their job functions.

In the course of searching for appropriate literature on the topic of working with LGBTQ audiences, nothing was found in the Extension-related publications analyzed by the researcher. When searched for content relating to such topics, *Journal of Extension*, *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*, *Journal of Youth Development*, and *Journal of Agricultural Education* all yielded zero results.

### **Purpose & Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to determine the professional development needs and experiences of Florida 4-H Extension Faculty members working with LGBTQ youth and communities.

Objectives for this project are:

1. To understand what experiences Faculty members have had working with the LGBTQ community
2. To determine the professional development needs of 4-H Extension Faculty members' working with LGBTQ youth and communities.
3. To identify the professional development trainings offered through Florida 4-H and UF/IFAS Extension related in terms of working with members of the LGBTQ community.

I would also like to state the reasoning motivation behind my conducting this research. Upon beginning my career as a 4-H Extension Faculty in Hillsborough County, Florida, I immediately began working with a group of youth from diverse backgrounds and I was able to observe how these backgrounds impacted their ability to interact with their peers and the adult volunteers and faculty within our 4-H organization. It was at this time that one of our youth expressed to us that

they were beginning their transition of their gender identity and would be attending our summer camp program. It was the experience of attempting to work with, not only the youth and their family, but also our university's various departments and leadership, that demonstrated to me how little I understood the LGBTQ community and its unique needs, as well as the lack of clarity provided to me as a faculty in how to best work with this segment of our stakeholder population. In discussions with my colleagues, I realized that I was not alone in feeling this way. The goal of this research is to establish an understanding of what 4-H Extension faculty members have experienced in their work with the LGBTQ community, identify what they feel they need to more effectively practice positive youth development with members of this community, and identify what trainings and professional development opportunities specifically regarding working with the LGBTQ community are available to them through the UF/IFAS system. My goal is that the findings of this research can be used to effect positive change within the UF/IFAS & Florida 4-H organizations to help meet these faculty members' needs and improve their ability to work with LGBTQ community members.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized qualitative research to answer the research objectives. Creswell (2013) described qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological tradition of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. To ensure that appropriate data were collected, the researcher utilized interviews and a professional development database.

### **Population and Sampling Procedure**

Participants were selected using stratified sampling, selecting participants from each of Florida 4-H's five geographical regions (districts) in order to adequately represent the state's 4-H faculty population. Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorenson (2006) state that stratified sampling "attempts to ensure that subgroups are represented" within the study's participants (p. 473). Participants selected were (1) currently employed by UF/IFAS Extension; (2) 4-H Extension Faculty members in Florida, and; (3) had at least three years of experience. The researcher interviewed participants through phone calls, Skype calls, and Zoom web calls, as well as in-person interviews when available. Eight participants was sought to establish an effective, representative sample of the Florida 4-H faculty population. In Florida Cooperative Extension, there are approximately 80 4-H Faculty members. Of these faculty members, approximately 45 have been employed in 4-H Extension for at least three years. After reaching out to prospective participants, only seven responded as willing to participate. This sample was deemed appropriate by the researcher as data saturation occurred and no new information was forthcoming towards the end of the interviews (Creswell, 2013). Table 1 below lists the participants in this study and provides additional information regarding their county and experience. Participants self-identified their counties as "Rural, Urban, or Mixed," based on their understanding of the demographic and cultural make-up of their communities. Participant "Tracy," was included in the study, despite only having 2.5 years of Extension experience. This was deemed appropriate by the researcher, as no other agent from the Southeast district either

met the criteria or responded as willing to participate. In order to maintain a representative sample of the entire Florida 4-H organization, Tracy was included in the study.

**Table 1: Participant Details**

<b>Participant Alias</b>	<b>Extension District</b>	<b>Type of County</b>	<b>Number of Years in Extension</b>
Phoebe	Central	Mix	7
Ted	Northwest	Mix	11
Robin	Northeast	Urban	3
Lily	Northeast	Rural	23
Tracy	Southeast	Urban	2.5
Rachel	Central	Mix	4.5
Monica	Southwest	Mix	7

### **Instrumentation**

Because there has not been a like-study conducted within Cooperative Extension, a researcher-developed interview guide was created and used to collect information from interview participants. An expert panel consisting of four members reviewed the interview guide to ensure its validity and reliability. This panel consisted of four members: An experienced 4-H Extension Faculty, one state Extension specialist that has prior 4-H Extension experience, one professor who teaches leadership within the context of culture and diversity, and a 4-H Program Leader from another state. Some members of this panel identify as members of the LGBTQ community, lending greater reliability and validity to the effectiveness of this instrument.

In order to establish a fundamental understanding of what training and professional development opportunities are available to Florida 4-H Extension faculty members, the researcher searched the databases of the University of Florida’s Electronic Data Information System (EDIS), Professional Development & Evaluation Center (PDEC), UF Human Resources’ Training & Organizational Development, and Florida 4-H’s training and professional development options for the past three years.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher used constant comparative method and content analysis to analyze the data collected for this study. The constant comparative method was used to reduce data from the interviews into identifiable, recurring themes (Merriam, 1998). For the third objective, quantitative content analysis was used to gather data from the professional development databases. A quantitative approach to content analysis differs from a qualitative approach in that frequencies are used to derive meaning whereas qualitative uses the researcher’s own interpretation (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

### **Limitations**

A limitation of this research is that only 4-H Extension faculty members at the county level were interviewed. State level 4-H faculty and staff were not included, limiting the perspectives available for this analysis.

## **Findings**

The interviews conducted with participants were divided into three distinct subcategories: Establishing a Sense of Belonging, Working with the LGBTQ+ Community, and Professional Development & Training. Within these subcategories, themes and trends emerged from the participants' responses. Summaries of these themes and trends are provided, and participants have been given pseudonyms in order to maintain confidentiality.

### **Results for Objective One:**

Objective one was to understand what experiences faculty members have had working with the LGBTQ community. Themes identified within objective one were: (a) personal definitions of belonging, (b) county-level demonstrations of belonging, (c) youth acceptance of the LGBTQ community, (d) county-level acceptance of the LGBTQ community, (e) rural and urban communities' acceptance of the LGBTQ community, (f) race and religion's impact on LGBTQ acceptance.

### **Belonging Defined**

Participants identified that a feeling of safety and support was a fundamental component of a sense of belonging (Robin, Tracy, Rachel, & Monica). Rachel elaborated on the point, stating "belonging means the feeling of being in the right place, being cared for, being included, being supported". Membership in a group environment (Phoebe, Ted, Robin, Lily, & Monica) also emerged as a common element to an established sense of belonging. Ted specifically stated that a sense of belonging means "these youth feel like they're part of a group; part of something bigger than themselves; they're accepted for who they are". Lily took the definition a step further, and connected it with a greater sense of connection: "Belonging – your identity is connected to a group. So in 4-H, the club is the first opportunity we have to make that connection to a group and, ultimately, make that connection to the community".

### **County-Level Belonging**

Nearly all of the respondents (Robin, Rachel, Ted, Lily, & Tracy) noted their county-level 4-H program was effective at establishing a sense of belonging among their participants, particularly in their community club programs. Ted described his county's 4-H program as "kids from different backgrounds coming together to learn about something, to put on an event, to lead a team...I think that's where 4-H succeeds is when you get a bunch of diverse kids together to do something". Phoebe and Monica offered a contrasting view of belonging in their counties. Phoebe stated:

Some of the special interest programs, they may not feel like they belong, however, they are a part of 4-H. Some of our more traditional clubs, or more community clubs, have a

sense of, not only belonging, but also of entitlement. Making the other 4-H groups feel like they do not belong or they're not part of it. When they are at a common event with our community clubs, the community clubs participants are very vocal in asking and telling them how, kind of like they're not 4-H.

Monica echoed a similar point, stating "we really strive to promote belonging, with all of our programs. I think that some clubs still struggle with belonging, but we're really moving in a positive direction with that".

### **Volunteer Training**

Lilly, Tracy, Rachel, and Monica explained that effective volunteer training was a key factor in establishing a sense of belonging in their community. Rachel noted that with many of her volunteers, their experience working as teachers helped to enhance the effectiveness of her 4-H volunteer training. Monica noted the structure of her county's training, telling the interviewer how she discusses the concept with her volunteers: "Reflecting back on belonging in all the trainings. Covering it in volunteer interviews and then, in action, working with the kids and showing and fostering belonging that way and demonstrating it". Tracy went on to describe her communication on the subject with the volunteers she trains:

The emphasis on wherever [sic] I am with the volunteer, I say the same thing, belonging is what gets them in the door, and that's the most important thing. Everyone wants to belong somewhere and we would like them to belong in 4-H and that can't happen if people don't feel like they belong somewhere.

### **Familiarity with the LGBTQ/LGBTQ+ Term**

All participants expressed some feeling of familiarity with the term 'LGBTQ/LGBTQ+'. Robin expressed her familiarity with the caveat, "I want to say I know the basics, but I don't – I'm no expert". Rachel expressed the highest level of familiarity, self-reporting that she identifies as a member of the LGBTQ+ community herself. Monica, Ted, Lily, & Tracy all reported they were either 'familiar' or 'pretty familiar' with the term.

### **Personal Definitions of Acceptance of the LGBTQ Community**

Participants tended to equate their definition and perspective of acceptance of the LGBTQ community with their views on belonging. Lily stated, "Acceptance and belonging, I think, are hand in hand in this", and Tracy echoed:

I don't think that it's any different from my core belief on belonging. Everybody deserves a place to belong somewhere. Your sexual orientation, that's your preference, and we would like all persons to be a part of 4-H.

Rachel's perspective on acceptance of the LGBTQ community was twofold, "having places, people, be aware of what actions, things that they say, that could separate the inclusion of the

LGBTQ audience”, and “then also, acceptance for me isn’t necessarily agreeing with, but supporting a person as an individual”.

### **Youth are More Accepting of Differences than Adults**

A theme found within the conversation of acceptance of the LGBTQ community centered on the idea that youth are quicker to accept the differences of the LGBTQ community than adults are. Phoebe, Ted, Robin, & Lily all specifically mentioned this phenomenon they have observed in their experiences working with members of the LGBTQ community. When asked for her thoughts on the cause of this phenomenon, Lily offered her perspective:

I think it has to do with personal history, personal experiences. I think that, the older we get, and we’ve had a negative experience with someone who’s not from our home community... I don’t think youth have those same biases.

Ted shared a specific story about youth within his program that he directly observed where an older youth introduced his younger sister, who was transitioning, and the other youth accepted the individual right away. When asked for his thoughts on why this phenomenon occurs, Ted stated he didn’t have an exact answer, but offered:

I think as people are becoming more accepting of the LGBTQ+ community – they’re around it more in schools and I think it’s becoming more second nature to them than just a generation before.

### **Rural vs. Urban Populations Acceptance of LGBTQ Community**

Distinctions among population sections within counties, particularly those that were identified as a mix of rural and urban populations, and their rate of acceptance of the LGBTQ communities as perceived by their 4-H faculty members was highlighted by some participants (Ted, Rachel, & Monica). Rachel and Monica both discussed the higher rate of acceptance among their urban populations within their counties, while noting that their rural population areas were less accepting in their observations. When asked about her county’s community meeting her vision of acceptance, Rachel said that half of her community does, and half does not. She elaborated, saying “the half of the county that does (meet her vision of acceptance) is more historically urban, it’s expanding in diversity, accepting of cultures and accepting of people”. Rachel elaborated on this point, stating, “It’s getting to the point that everyone is different and so it’s [sic] – you don’t have the “us vs. them,” because everyone is different – there is no ‘us vs. them’”. In contrast Ted was surprised by the acceptance demonstrated by the rural population of his county:

I guess when you work with a lot of rural communities, you get some old ideas on how things should be and should not be, and I was always a little concerned that maybe [sic] – specific instance, our livestock board is in the rural part of the county, the north part of the county, and we’ve had folks from the LGBTQ+ community partake in livestock projects and board meetings and other things, and I was always concerned that they wouldn’t be accepted, but they really have been.

## **Religious Influence**

When discussing their observations of their communities' willingness to accept and work with members of the LGBTQ community, religion or religious values came up in multiple conversations (Phoebe, Rachel, & Monica) and how it may impede that community's acceptance. Monica put it succinctly when talking about her community club program, stating "There are some clubs that the individuals themselves are very religious-focused, so they may not be as inclusive of the LGBTQ community". Rachel elaborated further, on her urban vs. rural point, offering:

Even though it (the more rural part of her community) is urban and growing very quickly, you still have the more conservative rural values, very based in religion [sic]; and so, therefore, there's judgement, not a lot of acceptance, and people just generally don't always feel welcomed in that community.

Rachel went on to tell a story about a specific club instituting prayer as part of their meeting's agendas, which made some families uncomfortable enough to leave the club, and even the program, entirely. She mentioned trying to have conversations about it with the group in question, and she was met with 'backlash'. When asked if she felt trained or empowered to handle that backlash, Rachel continued:

No, it's hard because I know that, especially when it comes to the separation of religion, the state program has gone through it, and there are policies that I can – that I've shared with leaders. It gets difficult when there's the possibility of not having the club anymore and then understanding that it effects the kids that are involved – the youth.

Rachel concluded her thoughts on this issue by outlining the difficult balance she tries to strike as a faculty:

I don't want 4-Hers to feel like they're not welcome in 4-H because they believe a certain way, but at the same time it's a barrier for those who are joining the program, and so I don't feel trained to handle situations like that. I've tried, but it is very nerve wracking.

## **Race**

Three participants specifically discussed the effects race have on the acceptance levels of their respective counties (Phoebe, Rachel, & Lily). When discussing acceptance as a whole, Rachel mentioned that in the rural section of her county, "people just generally don't always feel welcomed in that community. And that's not even specific to LGBTQ, that's anyone who's not a white, Caucasian, doesn't always get accepted into that community". Phoebe put it more bluntly, when asked what LGBTQ acceptance looks like in her county: "They ignore it. However, if you're white, it's more acceptable than any other race... they'll see you as white, not LGBTQ".

## **Results from Objective Two:**

Objective two was to determine the professional development needs of 4-H Extension Faculty members' working with LGBTQ youth and communities. Themes identified within objective two were: (a) uncertainty regarding Florida 4-H's LGBTQ policies, (b) need for clearer LGBTQ policies at the state level, (c) a lack of existing training opportunities regarding working with LGBTQ audiences, (d) need for additional communication training, & (e) need for additional LGBTQ specific trainings

### **Prior Training**

Most of the participants had attended a training dealing specifically with LGBTQ topics at either, or both, a past Joint Conference of Extension Professionals (JCEP) or National Association of Extension 4-H Faculty members (NAE4-HA) conference (Phoebe, Lily, Ted, Rachel, & Monica). Tracy and Robin had each attended an overall diversity training where LGBTQ was brought up, but was not the specific focus of the training event. Rachel and Robin mentioned one that was put on through the Florida 4-H Youth Development Institute in 2017, which also was a general diversity training, but did feature LGBTQ as a topic of discussion.

### **Need for Communication Training**

Participants noted a desire for training in regards to how best to communicate with members of the LGBTQ community (Rachel, Monica, Tracy, & Robin). Tracy demonstrated her self-awareness in this regard, stating she would like to better learn, "'The Lingo,' so that when you're working with youth and you hear terms you can understand. Since I'm not part of that community, I don't have the vernacular". Robin described it this way:

I think we need training on just general information about that community – just simple things on, how do youth like to be communicated to [sic]? Understanding that you should ask or understand that some youth like to have different pronouns.

### **Need for Guidelines & Policies**

Nearly all participants mentioned a lack of policies and guidelines laid out by the University of Florida, UF/IFAS Extension, and Florida 4-H in terms of how to respond to needs of the LGBTQ community (Phoebe, Ted, Robin, Lily, Rachel, & Monica). Monica was direct in her statement regarding such guidelines when asked if she faced any barriers when working with the LGBTQ community, stating "yes, not having specific guidelines or policy in place. I know a lot of what comes up, we have to take case-by-case, but there are no specific guidelines to steer that conversation". Lily discussed her views on the subject, noting the lack of policies being implemented was likely because the Florida 4-H organization doesn't "want to get it wrong," but misses out on "being proactive and trying to model from other states that have tried to make these policies". Ted was more specific, stating he'd like to see policies regarding housing accommodations for overnight events.

Participants were generally unsure or uncertain of what Florida 4-H's policies were or what implications were presented by such policies (Monica, Rachel, Lily, Robin, & Phoebe). Robin

began describing a need for training on policies, and then followed up on the idea in this way: “I think we need training on policies, but policies have to be made before those trainings can happen”. Lily elaborated, explaining how the lack of policies reflects a lack of understanding of the youth entering Florida 4-H, stating:

I have been asking for the last couple of years, that we need to have some inclusion policies, and some structure so we can properly foster the relationships with those youth, and we haven't. So that tells me that we don't quite understand the youth that we're bringing into our program.

### **Need for Security When Following Through With Decisions**

Robin discussed her concerns regarding support for decisions she makes when acting without the policies and guidelines discussed above. She offered her summary on why this is a key issue:

I want to be able to say ‘This is the decision I made because of the guidelines from our state office,’ and to know the state office will back you up on that decision. I think it's important – and I even think, more not for the trans family, but for the kids involved, if you do have that family that is going to be upset with a trans youth or a gay youth in the cabin, or whatever [sic], that when they go to complain to the state office or say something, that ‘no, this is our policy,’ and know that the state office is going to back you up on having an environment where all youth are invited to attend.

### **Lack of Exposure to the LGBTQ Community**

Lily talked about the importance of exposure to the LGBTQ culture and community:

I think exposure, creating an environment in Florida 4-H that allows you to feel comfortable with who they are. Because I know that we've had plenty of youth come through our state events and our camping programs that have been in that community but have felt so uncomfortable that they came and kept their mouths shut and their heads down. I would love that the exposure to working with the youth, needs to go hand in hand with the professional development.

In contrast, Monica pointed out that she doesn't even know where to begin seeking additional training and development, stating when asked what types of trainings she'd like to see in the future, “I don't know. You don't know what you don't know, so I don't even know what to ask for”.

### **Results from Objective Three:**

Objective three was to identify the professional development trainings offered through Florida 4-H and UF/IFAS Extension related in terms of working with members of the LGBTQ community. The researcher reviewed UF/IFAS training and professional development offerings spanning the past three years for programs specifically utilizing the keywords: ‘LGBTQ’, ‘LGBT’, ‘diversity’,

& 'inclusion'. In such searches of the PDEC archive, as well as past Youth Development Institute (YDI) and Extension Symposium offerings, zero results were returned.

## **Conclusions & Implications**

Through the course of their interviews, participants discussed, opined, and offered ideas regarding their experiences in terms of working with the LGBTQ community in Florida 4-H. The key themes identified in this process were: (a) personal definitions of belonging, (b) county-level demonstrations of belonging, (c) youth acceptance of the LGBTQ community, (d) county-level acceptance of the LGBTQ community, (e) rural and urban communities' acceptance of the LGBTQ community, (f) race and religion's impact on LGBTQ acceptance, (g) uncertainty regarding Florida 4-H's LGBTQ policies, (h) need for clearer LGBTQ policies at the state level, (i) a lack of existing training opportunities regarding working with LGBTQ audiences, (j) need for additional communication training, & (k) need for additional LGBTQ specific trainings. It is important to note that the qualitative nature of the data provided means the conclusions are not intended to be generalized beyond the respondents; however, a concerted effort to provide thick, rich descriptions of the contexts and responses has been made to assist the reader in determining the transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of results to his or her own 4-H youth development context.

### **Conclusions from Objective 1:**

Participants displayed a common set of values in the sense of belonging definition, focusing on safety and comfort in expressing a member's individuality which falls in line with the existing literature, as a safe and inclusive environment and a positive relationship with a caring adult are paramount to a youth's development (Samuel & Rose, 2011). This serves as a strong protective factor for youth members in Florida 4-H and demonstrates a depth of care and compassion in Florida 4-H faculty members. The focus put on training volunteers in establishing a sense of belonging by these participants demonstrates the emphasis placed on that essential element at the local 4-H level.

Emphasis should be placed on the high level of acceptance of the LGBTQ community among youth, as noted by the participants. It serves as an indicator that the population of young people participating in the Florida 4-H program are actively demonstrating the establishment of a sense of belonging among their peer groups. Florida 4-H is a program that has a significant component focused on leadership development among youth, and this level of acceptance demonstrates the youth's desire to include people from diverse backgrounds and build a sense of community within their ranks, as well as demonstrating character development which is a key aspect of positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2008).

Factors such as race, religion, and the rural or urban make-up of a faculty's county played a role in that county's ease and quickness to accept members of the LGBTQ community, both at the county population level and the county 4-H programmatic level. These are factors that concern 4-H faculty members and detract from their ability to establish an inclusive and accepting 4-H environment for all potential members and stakeholders within their communities. This is a key item of concern, as this may be preventing Florida 4-H faculty members from implementing the

Florida 4-H best management practices of inclusion (*4-H Policies & Best Management Practices*, 2019), as well as potentially impacting the faculty members' abilities to foster effective youth-adult partnerships.

### **Conclusions from Objective 2:**

When discussing training and development with the participants, there was an overall lack of knowledge and understanding in terms of what trainings they wanted to see offered, what was already available, and what structure those trainings would follow. This lack of information may stem from a lack of knowledge and existing programs dedicated to working with the LGBTQ community, as well as limited exposure to the LGBTQ community. This lack of understanding of the LGBTQ community could be a contributing factor to the "you don't know what you don't know" feeling expressed by Monica. Without further training and development, faculty may feel confused, and the work that they are doing may feel ineffective and leave them unsatisfied (House, 1996).

Conversely, a lack of training and professional development on needs of the LGBTQ community and how to work most effectively with them in a professional capacity may also contribute to the lack of responses in terms of what trainings are most needed. Organizations that provide such training, development, and exposure to its employees actively work to understand the LGBTQ community and its diverse stakeholders, engaging them in a dialogue to determine the needs that they have, and provides that information to its employees to empower them in their daily work with that community. Organizations that do not provide such training and information to its employees could be perceived as failing to engage their stakeholders in meaningful dialogue, thus failing to empower their faculty to do the best job possible to meet the needs of these stakeholders. Failing to empower employees has been demonstrated to decrease social capital and the overall success of an organization over time (Rahmdel & Rahmdel, 2013).

There is a ubiquitous desire for Florida 4-H to establish guidelines and policies on working with the LGBTQ community and how to best accommodate their unique needs. The lack of direction and clarity on this topic drew the ire of most participants in the study and was the root cause, as expressed by participants, for their feelings of ineffectiveness in terms of working with the LGBTQ community. House (1996) explains that it is the duty of an organization's leadership to provide such clarity in order for the faculty to achieve their goals and a sense of satisfaction in their job functions. There is a lack of policies and guidelines available to Florida 4-H faculty members, thus reducing clarity in their job functions, specifically regarding how faculty work and communicate with the LGBTQ community.

### **Conclusions from Objective 3:**

The lack of specific and targeted training and professional development regarding working with the LGBTQ community available to Florida 4-H professionals is an area of concern for UF/IFAS Extension and Florida 4-H. Faculty members seeking to improve their ability to work with this community have no resources from UF/IFAS from which to choose, whereby impeding faculty members' abilities to improve community and stakeholder interactions and relationships, and was highlighted as a theme during the interview process. It should be noted that the content

analysis in this study focused on the opportunities offered over the past three years only; trainings and opportunities may have been offered previously, and were thus not observed in this work, as well as outside UF/IFAS Extension such as university at-large offerings and national Extension conferences and resources.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Establishing a sense of belonging is an essential element of the Florida 4-H program and has been demonstrated by the 4-H Extension faculty members interviewed through this process. Florida 4-H can improve its ability to foster a sense of belonging by exploring possible policies and guidelines for effectively working with the LGBTQ community and its participants in the Florida 4-H program. Florida 4-H administration could create a taskforce of 4-H faculty members charged with drafting policies and guidelines that would be effective in working with the LGBTQ community. Not only would these guidelines assist in fostering a sense of belonging for Florida 4-H's LGBTQ stakeholders, it would also establish a clear precedent of Florida 4-H administration supporting faculty members in their work of enhancing the cultures of inclusion and belonging.

To help facilitate the development of these policies and guidelines, UF/IFAS Extension & Florida 4-H could engage in a proactive dialogue with LGBTQ members and advocates of its stakeholder base in order to determine what their needs are and what UF/IFAS Extension and Florida 4-H faculty members should know and practice when working with their community. From this dialogue, a clearer picture of what policies, guidelines, and best management practices could be drafted for implementation in the youth development field in Florida.

Through the course of this research interview process, a number of disconcerting themes were reported by Florida 4-H faculty members, including anecdotes of racism, demonstrations of religious prejudice, and discrimination based on what delivery mode they receive 4-H from. In addition, 4-H faculty members described feeling underprepared to handle these situations. UF/IFAS Extension and Florida 4-H leadership could help alleviate this feeling of unpreparedness by providing communication that clearly delineates the organization will support a faculty's actions to remove such behavior from their programs.

Training and professional development opportunities for 4-H Extension faculty members regarding working with the LGBTQ community are a demonstrated need within the organization. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), 4-H and Positive Youth Development division should lead the charge in developing a national standard curriculum for 4-H Extension faculty members to learn how to work best with the LGBTQ community. Leveraging their network of partners and resources, NIFA is in a unique position to provide a high-quality and wide-ranging training program in this regard. NIFA could establish a "train the trainer" program for this initiative as well, thus empowering 4-H faculty members to be able to bring these trainings and ideas to their volunteers, who deliver the 4-H program in their counties. This would ensure a strong and consistent message throughout the 4-H landscape and impact the entire 4-H community.

UF/IFAS Human Resources could pursue the following activities to assist the needs of 4-H Extension faculty: (1) drafting and disseminating a series of trainings that would discuss topics specifically focused on LGBTQ communication and community needs, and; (2) seeking a partnership, or a series of partnerships, with LGBTQ or diversity training providers to provide training opportunities and curriculums that faculty members can take themselves and then offer to their volunteer bases in order to keep the inclusion message consistent throughout county programs. A strong example in this regard is the Reeducation program instituted in New York 4-H (Hamilton-Honey, 2017). Through this series of trainings and activities, participants came to better understand their own personal biases, as well as the experiences and difficulties faced by members of the LGBTQ community. The program carried out in New York began as a cohort of 4-H leadership that underwent a training and education process, spanning a timeline of a year, before the program was adapted into trainings, workshops and toolkits for faculty, volunteers, and youth to utilize (Hamilton-Honey, 2017). UF/IFAS Extension and Florida 4-H should invest such time and resources to train and implement similar practices in Florida 4-H, similarly beginning with IFAS and 4-H leadership creating a cohort to better understand the LGBTQ community experience. Doing so would create a culture of commitment enhancing inclusion among faculty and the organization throughout the state.

UF/IFAS Human Resources could also implement a cultural competencies assessment as part of the hiring process. Through the use of assessment tools such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), UF/IFAS could establish a baseline competency ensuring the quality of programming demonstrated by faculty would be inclusive and culturally competent. A further recommendation would be that 4-H faculty implement the use of a cultural competency assessment tool and training when onboarding and training volunteers, ensuring the quality of volunteer personnel interacting with our youth and stakeholders meets the standards and expectations of inclusion and belonging.

### **Recommendations for Research**

UF/IFAS Extension should perform a needs assessment of its entire faculty population to understand their abilities and knowledge to work with the LGBTQ community. The results of this study indicate a low knowledge and preparedness among 4-H faculty to work with the LGBTQ community. This should be highlighted as a top priority, as understanding the needs and experiences of the entire faculty population should be completed and analyzed prior to the development and implementation of a training or professional development program.

Research regarding the needs of the LGBTQ community, in terms of their interactions with Land-Grant universities (LGUs) and community outreach programs, should also be conducted. Education and outreach professionals need to better understand what this segment of the population needs in order to deliver high-quality education and programming. By evaluating the needs of the LGBTQ population and their interactions with LGUs, the organization can improve the training and development opportunities provided to Extension professionals. Another research recommendation should focus on the impact of race and religion on LGBTQ youth member participation in the 4-H program.

4-H is a faculty-led, volunteer-delivered community outreach and youth development program. With this in mind, further research needs to be conducted on the volunteer competencies in working with the LGBTQ community. Research studies should be conducted to better understand volunteer experiences in working with the LGBTQ community and how they need to be better equipped to work with this population. Future research should also be conducted to better understand the experiences of 4-H LGBTQ youth members and the impact that 4-H involvement has on their development. This research can also help identify any barriers or challenges LGBTQ youth face as members of the 4-H organization to improve the quality of the programs offered in order to better serve the LGBTQ community, and potentially other diverse audiences as well.

## Appendix A: Interview Guide

### **Interview Guide for 4-H Faculty members**

#### *Demographics –*

1. What county do you work in?
2. How long have you been an Extension faculty?
3. Is your county Rural, Urban, or a mix?

#### *Establishing a Sense of Belonging*

4. “Belonging” is an essential element of the 4-H program. Describe what “belonging” means in your own words.
5. What does belonging look like in your County 4-H program?
6. What steps do you take to foster a sense of belonging in your County 4-H program?
7. Do you feel Florida 4-H is effective in fostering a sense of belonging?

#### *Working with the LGBTQ+ Community*

8. How familiar are you with the term “LGBTQ+?”
9. What does “acceptance” of the LGBTQ+ community look like?
  - Does your community meet your vision of acceptance?
  - Does your County 4-H program meet that vision of acceptance?
10. Please describe the experience you have working with youth that identify as LGBTQ+.
11. Please describe the experience you have working with parents or volunteers that identify as LGBTQ+.
12. If you feel comfortable to share, describe your willingness to work with members/volunteers that are LGBTQ+.
  - Do you feel your county 4-H program is comfortable working with members/volunteers that are LGBTQ+? Please explain.
13. Do you face any barriers, obstacles, or challenges when working with the LGBTQ+ community? Please explain.

*Professional Development –*

14. Are you prepared to work with the LGBTQ+ community? If yes or no, please explain.
15. What training or professional development have you participated in that has focused on working with the LGBTQ+ community?
16. What types of training or professional development do you, or other faculty members, need to effectively work with the LGBTQ+ community?

*Conclusion –*

17. Is there anything else you would like to talk about that we haven't already?

## Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter



Behavioral/NonMedical Institutional Review Board  
FWA00005790

PO Box 112250  
Gainesville FL 32611-2250  
Telephone: (352) 392-0433  
Facsimile: (352) 392-9234  
Email: irb2@ufl.edu

DATE: 4/28/2019  
TO: Charles Polisenio  
5339 COUNTY ROAD 579  
SEFFNER, Florida 335843334  
FROM: Ira Fischler, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus  
Chair IRB-02

IRB #: **IRB201901190**  
TITLE: Understanding the Experiences and Needs of 4-H Extension Agents Working with the LGBTQ+ Community

### **Approved as Exempt**

You have received IRB approval to conduct the above-listed research project. Approval of this project was granted on 4/26/2019 by IRB-02. This study is approved as exempt because it poses minimal risk and is approved under the following exempt category/categories:

2. Research that includes only interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of 3 criteria are met: (i) the information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; OR (iii) the information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7) (which relate to there being adequate provisions for protecting privacy and maintaining confidentiality) AND the research is not subject to subpart D.

#### **Special notes to Investigator (if applicable):**

In the myIRB system, Exempt approved studies will not have an approval stamp on the consents, flyers, emails, etc. However, the documents reviewed are the ones that should be used. So, under ATTACHMENTS you should find the document that has been reviewed

and approved. If you need to modify the document(s) in any manner, then you'd need to submit to our office for review and approval prior to implementation.

**Principal Investigator Responsibilities:**

The PI is responsible for the conduct of the study. Important responsibilities described at the above link include:

- Using currently approved consent form to enroll subjects (if applicable)
- Renewing your study before expiration
- Obtaining approval for revisions before implementation
- Reporting Adverse Events
- Retention of Research Records
- Obtaining approval to conduct research at the VA
- Notifying other parties about this project's approval status

Should the nature of the study change or you need to revise the protocol in any manner please contact this office prior to implementation.

**Study Team:**

Matthew Bengtson Co-Investigator

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*The Foundation for The Gator Nation*

**An Equal Opportunity Institution**

*Confidentiality Notice: This e-mail message, including any attachments, is for the sole use of the intended recipient(s), and may contain legally privileged or confidential information. Any other distribution, copying, or disclosure is strictly prohibited. If you are not the intended recipient, please notify the sender and destroy this message immediately. Unauthorized access to confidential information is subject to federal and state laws and could result in personal liability, fines, and imprisonment. Thank you.*

Appendix C: Email Invitation to Participants

Hi [Participant],

I hope this finds you well!

I am conducting a study on the experiences and needs of Extension faculty members working with both youth and adults in the LGBTQ+ community, and I'm hoping you will agree to participate. The purpose of this study is to better understand the experience faculty members with at least three years experience have working with the LGBTQ+ community and what additional professional development or training they feel they need to better connect with this community. It will provide us with valuable information that will be used to offer recommendations on how to better equip faculty members with knowledge and skills to understand and connect with LGBTQ+ members and adults.

If you choose to participate, you will participate in a 45 minute interview via Zoom or Skype. Your participation in this study will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law, and your responses will not be connected with your name. Also, if you choose to participate, please sign and return the attached informed consent form prior to your interview.

Are you willing to participate?

Sincerely,

Charlie

Charles K. Poliseno  
4-H Extension Faculty  
UF/IFAS Extension Hillsborough County  
813-744-5519 ext. 54132

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