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Rural High School Staff Experiences in Implementing Intervention Strategies Against Bullying of LGBTQ Students

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Abstract

Rural High School Staff Experiences in Implementing Intervention Strategies Against Bullying of LGBTQ Students

by

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MS in General Psychology, University of Phoenix, 2010

BS in Psychology, Cazenovia College, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students in rural schools experience verbal and physical harassment due to their sexual orientation, which leads to higher rates of substance abuse, psychological problems, and greater academic failure when compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Because of the high percentage (81%) of LGBTQ students in rural schools experiencing bullying incidents, it is important to explore how the attitudes and perceptions of professional school staff influence the implementation of intervention strategies to prevent bullying in rural schools. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight into, and knowledge of, professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. The theoretical framework was based on Albert Bandura's social cognitive learning theory, with a focus on collective efficacy. A qualitative case study design was used, with purposeful sampling of 9 professional school staff from a rural high school who have experienced or are familiar with LGBTQ student bullying and intervention strategies. The data were analyzed and coded to identify categories and themes. The results of this study indicated that, although there is limited training and exposure to the LGBTQ population in this rural setting, all 9 school staff were supportive of, and willing to help, their LGBTQ students. These findings have implications for positive social change by supporting collaboration to address antibullying policy and training and education programs to end bullying for all American students.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my daughter, Bailey. You are my constant inspiration. You have changed my life and you have helped me stay motivated. I also want to dedicate this to my husband, Jesse. You have helped me through the worst and best times. You have always been my cheerleader and supporter. I could not have done any of this without you. Finally, I want to dedicate this to the two women who raised me. My mother, Karen, and my grandmother, Barbara. Thank you for showing me what a strong woman looks like and helping shape me along the way. I love you all.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students, in the middle and high school settings, reported ongoing struggles related to bullying and not feeling accepted by their peers and the school staff (Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2013; Huebner, Thoma, & Neilands, 2013; Kosciw, Greytalk, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012). The findings from a survey conducted by Koswic et al. (2012) indicated that 63.5% of the LGBTQ students felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation and 56.9% of the students felt unable to reach out to their school staff after hearing homophobic remarks from teachers and other school staff. Also, 60.4% of LGBTQ students did not report bullying incidents to school staff because they believed that their school staff would not be helpful or that the situation could worsen (Koswic et al., 2012). Moreover, 36.7% of the students, who informed school staff about bullying incidents, noted that the school staff did not assist them (Koswic et al., 2012).

Research data have further indicated that there is a lack of support for LGBTQ students when reporting bullying incidents to professional school staff in rural schools (Gottschalk & Newton, 2009; Kosciw, Greytalk, & Diaz, 2009; Kosciw et al., 2012). In addition, data from both rural and urban high school students indicate that LGTBQ students, in urban high schools, were less likely to experience bullying and harassment due to their sexual orientation or gender expression when compared to their rural counterparts (Gottschalk & Newton, 2009; Kosciw, Greytalk, & Diaz, 2009; Kosciw et al., 2012).

Eighty-one percent of LGBTQ students in rural schools reported experiencing verbal harassment and 38.3% reported experiencing physical harassment due to their sexual orientation (Kosciw et al., 2012), which led to higher rates of substance abuse, psychological problems, and greater academic failure when compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2013; Huebner, Thoma, & Neilands, 2013). According to Birkett, Espelage, and Koenig (2009), because of the high percentage of LGBTQ students in rural schools complaining about bullying incidents, researchers should explore how professional school staff's attitudes and perceptions influence the implementation of intervention strategies to prevent bullying in rural schools. Therefore, this qualitative study focused on rural, professional school staff's (i.e., nurses, counselors, psychologists, teachers, administrators, and principals) experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state.

Chapter 1 introduces the qualitative case study designed that explored the professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. Chapter one includes a background section that provides a historical review of the literature and a brief description of the gap regarding how rural professional school staff's attitudes and perceptions influenced intervention strategies to prevent bullying in a rural high school. Chapter 1 will also include a description of the problem, the study's purpose, the research questions, and the conceptual framework. The chapter will further include information about the nature of the study, definitions of key concepts, the

research assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, the significance of the study, and close with a summary.

Background

Bullying toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning (LGBTQ) students is an ongoing problem in schools all over the United States (Fedewa, & Ahn, 2011; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Kosciw, Greytalk, & Dia, 2009). Bullying has contributed to many LGBTQ students' social and psychological difficulties, such as feelings of being unsafe in the school system, depression, suicidal ideation, use/abuse of substances, poor academic performance, and lack of peer support (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Fedewa, & Ahn, 2011; Kosciw et al., 2012; Kosciw et al., 2009). Resolving bullying situations, to include the associated social and psychological difficulties, is problematic because LGBTQ students were not comfortable or confident in approaching teaching staff about bullying experiences and personal safety in the rural school setting (Kosciw et al., 2012). According to Kosciw et al. (2012), almost 57% of the students surveyed, stated that school staff members were overheard making disparaging remarks, about students' gender expressions, to other school staff. As a result, many LGBTQ students felt unsafe in their schools, which was a factor that led to the development of antibullying programs (Andreou, Didaskalou, & Vlachou, 2008; Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2013).

Antibullying programs have existed in the United States since 1970 (Allanson, Lester, Notar, 2015). Until that time, bullying and harassment of students, within the public schools, were not major concerns for the professional school staff. Olweus (1978)

pioneered the first antibullying program in the American school system, titled, 'The Owleus Bullying Prevention Program' and introduced the program to professional school staff. It was not until the No Child Left Behind Act, in 2001, that legislators enacted laws and regulations to address, discourage, and prevent bullying in the public-school system (Allanson, Lester, Notar, 2015). Before the early 2000s, teachers had limited exposure to antibullying programs (Allanson et al., 2015). Currently, teachers are gaining more exposure to training materials and intervention strategies (Rigby, 2014). However, with the current exposure to modern training materials and intervention strategies, the outcomes of antibullying programs show inconsistencies and a lack of long-term effectiveness (Rigby, 2014).

Cunningham et al. (2016) evaluated 103 teachers', from public and Catholic urban schools in a central Canadian community, opinions and how they implemented intervention programs. Cunningham et al. uncovered five significant areas of concern from the teaching staff participants. Concerns identified by the participants included a lack of administrative support. The participants noted that administration did not listen to teaching staff about the intervention approaches and benefits of the intervention programs (Cunningham et al., 2016). In addition, participants discussed their concerns about not receiving sufficient training, the lack of support from colleagues, and students' unwillingness to participate, especially after observing the lack of senior administrative support for implementing antibullying programs (Cunningham et al., 2016). Participants also reported difficulties with implementing intervention programs due to a lack of time,

resources, and follow-through from senior administrators, such as the school principals (Cunningham et al., 2016).

According to Cunningham et al. (2016) and Rigby (2014), antibullying intervention programs have not been overly beneficial due to implementation problems, training problems, and a lack of administrative support for the programs. Additionally, senior school administrators require teaching staff to implement bullying intervention programs, yet the teaching staff appeared to have little input into how or when they should implement the programs or how much training they may need (Cunningham et al., 2016; Rigby, 2014). Antibullying intervention programs have only been in the American school since the 1970s and, educational research relating to the implementation of school bullying intervention programs is limited (Cunningham et al., 2016; Rigby, 2014). Professional school staff's attitudes and perceptions of LGBTQ bullying intervention programs and their influence on the implementation of specific bullying intervention programs are areas that are under-researched (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009).

Problem Statement

The problem this research addressed was the gap in the literature concerning professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. Existing research includes information about how the unsupportive attitudes of professional school staff have a direct effect on the implementation of schools' intervention strategies, programs, and policies, which negatively impact LGBTQ students' school experiences (Berlan, Corliss, Field, Goodman, & Austin, 2010; Huebner,

Thoma, & Neilands, 2013) and socioemotional development (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Fedewa, & Ahn, 2011; Kosciw et al., 2012; Kosciw et al., 2009). Bullying of LGBTQ students is an ongoing problem in schools all over the United States (Fedewa, & Ahn, 2011; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Kosciw, Greytalk, & Dia, 2009), and rural school staff do not appear to be effectively addressing bullying incidents (Kosciw et al., 2012).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight into and knowledge of professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. Research to-date, regarding professional school staff and bullying toward LGBTQ students, has mostly provided insight into and knowledge of how teachers and middle to high school students have responded to curricula that focused on antibullying intervention programs (Andreou, Didaskalou, & Vlachou, 2008). The potential insight into and knowledge gained from this qualitative study could provide professional school staff with a greater understanding of how their attitudes and perceptions influence the implementation of intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of not only LGBTQ students but bullying towards all students. Additionally, the results of this study could potentially inform senior professional administrative staff about how the level of support given to school staff could influence the staff's attitudes and perceptions toward implementation of bullying intervention strategies.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state?

Subquestions

1. What are the professional school staff's attitudes towards implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state?
2. How do professional school staff perceive their experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework selected for this study was Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory. The social cognitive theory initially started out as the social cognitive learning theory; however, Bandura redeveloped the theory in 1986 and addressed how learning occurs in social contexts with a focus on the interactions and relationships that exist among people and their environments (Bandura, 1997,2005). Bandura believed that to apply learned behaviors and effectively model others in an environment, individuals must have self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997,1998, 2005), the application of self-efficacy, while gaining an understanding of the human experience and learning from one's environment, is a central concept of the social cognitive learning theory.

Researchers apply the concept of self-efficacy when focusing on individuals and collective efficacy when focusing on a group (Bandura, 1997,1998, 2005; Barchia & Bussey, 2011). Bandura (1997) defined collective efficacy as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (p. 477). For this study, I will use Bandura's concept of collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997,1998, 2005), as the main concept for the research.

Collective efficacy is an area of the social cognitive theory that involves group motivation and the likelihood of engaging in certain behaviors and choices (Barchia & Bussey, 2011). When researching group dynamics, within a school system, researchers have found connections between collective efficacy and the justification for aggressive behaviors (Barchia & Bussey, 2011). Therefore, in relation to the study, it was possible that due to the group's collective efficacy, educators and school staff could have justified their lack of understanding, willingness to support the LGBTQ students' experiences, and reporting bullying incidents, based on the social norm within the rural school system. The utilization of the collective efficacy concept assisted with gaining understanding about how school staff relationships with each other and the climate of the rural high school affected the current intervention methods used to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students. The use of Bandura's social cognitive learning theory could potentially provide a social-cognitive framework to understand professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state.

Nature of the Study

The qualitative research design was the most effective method to respond to the research question in this study. The qualitative research design included several beneficial characteristics where: (a) the researcher gained an understanding of the participants' experiences as it pertained to the phenomenon under examination, (b) the researcher was the primary instrument for the data collection and analysis, and (c) the researcher explained the phenomenon and provided details in the study's results (Merriam, 2002). To respond to the research questions, guiding this qualitative investigation, I selected a single case study design to evaluate the professional staff at a rural high school in a northeastern state. Based on the work of Baxter and Jack (2008) and Merriam (2002), a case study design was best-suited to explore professional school staff's experiences implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state.

This qualitative study included data collected from a rural high school in a northeastern state. Utilizing a qualitative case study design, I used triangulation to achieve trustworthiness by using data from various sources such as interviews, observations, and documentation review (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 2002). I conducted face-to-face interviews with nine school staff who were in professional and administrative positions, such as nurses, teachers, counselors, psychologists, and principals. School staff served as key informants within the high school setting, ranging from Grades 7 through 12. School staff participants had at least 3 years of experience within their professional fields (i.e., nurses, teachers, counselors, psychologists, and

principals). I also made observations, during the interviews, to obtain additional information about how the rural high school staff responded to the interview questions and the topic. In addition, I reviewed the school's bullying policy and procedure document. I will provide more information about the methodology in Chapter 3.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are conceptually and operationally defined based on how they were used in the study:

Aggression (verbal and physical) - "behaviors such as fighting, name-calling, bullying, and social exclusion" (Espelage & Swearer, 2008, p. 155).

Bullying - "a distinct type of aggression characterized by a repeated and systematic abuse of power, such as verbal aggression (name-calling and threats), relational aggression (social isolation and rumor spreading), and cyber-aggression (text messaging and e-mailing hurtful messages or images" (Cook et al., 2010, p. 65).

Collective efficacy - "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment" (Bandura, 1997, p. 477).

Discrimination - "the practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other individuals or groups of people" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015, sect. "Definition of Discrimination").

Gender conforming - "When one's gender identity, gender expression and sex 'match' according to social norms." (Gender Equality Resource Center, 2013).

Gender nonconforming - "When one does not conform to society's expectations of gender expression based on the gender binary, expectation of masculinity and femininity, or how one should identify one's gender" (Gender Equality Resource Center, 2013).

Sexual harassment - According to Rabelo and Cortina (2014), psychologists have further expanded sexual harassment to help cover possible problems that LGBTQ individuals may run into such as "unwanted sexual attention or undesirable expressions" (i.e., verbal attacks toward LGBTQ students), "sexual coercion, and gender harassment" (Rabelo & Cortina, 2014, p. 379).

Heteronormativity - "an ideology that assumes the heterosexual experience is the normal human experience" (Chevrette, 2013, p. 173).

Homophobia (homophobic) - "A range of negative attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality or people who are identified or perceived as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). Homophobia can be expressed as antipathy, contempt, prejudice, aversion, or hatred. Homophobia may be based on irrational fear and it is sometimes related to religious beliefs" (University of Michigan, 2014, sect. "LGBT Terms and Definitions").

Personal efficacy - "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of actions required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3).

Assumptions

According to Simon (2011), philosophical assumptions always exist in qualitative research, which comes naturally from the researchers' beliefs and deeply ingrained views

of what they have learned as valuable. This qualitative case study included the following assumptions. A key assumption was that rural school staff do not effectively support or protect LGBTQ students in the school setting. There was an assumption that the school staff would answer the interview questions (see Appendix E) based on their personal experiences, truthfully, and accurately. Another assumption was that the rural, professional school staff do not get the support they need from their senior administrators to support the LGBTQ students. A final assumption was that the rural, professional school staff's attitudes and perceptions toward LGBTQ students have some influence on the implementation of intervention strategies.

Scope and Delimitations

The study was limited to a rural school in a northeastern state. I explored professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. The participants in this study were professional school staff, such as principals, teachers, nurses, counselors, and administrators. Although the maintenance, janitorial, and cafeteria staff are professionals in their jobs, they were not participants in the study. The results from this study could potentially inform senior professional school staff, such as principals and administration, about how professional school staff could be better supported when dealing with LGBTQ issues in the school. In addition, the results could lead to understanding and helping manage how school staff's attitudes and perceptions influence the implementation of bullying intervention strategies and potentially transfer this information to assist other rural schools throughout America.

Limitations

A qualitative case study has limitations within the design. Because I chose a qualitative case study for the research design, I only needed a smaller number of participants to meet saturation when compared to utilizing another methodology that would require a larger participant sample (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002). Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) recommended a small sample to allow the researcher and participants time to build a relationship, which could allow the participants more comfort when sharing their experiences. To resolve this limitation, I assured that the sample size was sufficient by getting as many participants as necessary to represent the population; approximately 5 to 10 participants were needed to meet saturation (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002). A case study design provided additional in-depth information about how the rural, professional school staff's attitudes and perceptions may contribute to how intervention strategies to prevent LGBTQ bullying in the rural school setting are implemented.

Additional limitations of this study included trustworthiness and transferability. To build trustworthiness and assure transferability to further research, I utilized several forms of data including interviews, observations, and documentation review to achieve triangulation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002). Another limitation associated with this study was potential research bias when collecting and analyzing the interview data, which made it difficult to establish validity and reliability. To mitigate researchers' biases, I acknowledged that personal biases might exist (e.g., expectations for research outcomes). To resolve this limitation, I developed open-ended, non-biased

interview questions, which were approved by my supervisory committee before I engaged in the observation and interview process. Additionally, to make the study more reliable and valid, I used an audio recording device during interviews to record the participants' interview responses accurately. I also transcribe each interview verbatim. Transcribing each participant's interview responses verbatim guarded against researcher bias and data skewing.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative research was unique because it addresses an under-researched area within the field of psychology. The study addressed professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. Research data have indicated that many LGBTQ students felt unsafe within their schools because they were bullied due to their sexual orientations and gender expressions (Kosciw et al., 2012). Researchers found that school staff was not effectively addressing the students' concerns when bullying incidents were reported (Kosciw et al., 2012) and the staff was not effectively implementing intervention programs to prevent the bullying (Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2013; Veenstra et al., 2014). In addition, it was unclear how rural school staff in a northeastern state, specifically, responded to intervention strategies for bullying toward LGBTQ students.

However, the collective efficacy of the group may negatively influence individual staff's attitudes and perceptions toward LGBTQ students, especially when they lack support from senior school administration (Calik et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2013). For

social change implications, the researchers, educators, and senior administrators could potentially use these findings to raise awareness about how the professional school staff's attitudes and perceptions influence the implementation of intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. In addition, the researchers, educators, and senior administrators may use these findings to develop future antibullying intervention strategies, programs, and policies for LGBTQ students across the United States.

Summary

Data from the National School Climate Survey included information about how LGBTQ students experienced a significant amount of bullying and harassment in rural high schools (Kosciw et al., 2012). Bullying and harassment have resulted in many LGBTQ students developing psychological problems, encountering problems with attendance and school performance, engaging in increased at-risk behaviors, developing suicidal ideation, and committing suicide (Berlan et al., 2010; Fedewa & Ahn, 2011; Kosciw et al., 2012). Many students have reported trying to inform school staff of bullying and harassment without any positive interventions or assistance from the professional school staff (Kosciw et al., 2012). Based on ideas from Bahns and Branscombe (2011), I used Bandura's social cognitive learning theory and the concept of collective efficacy to explain how the group's norms may justify or contribute to the actions of the individual members.

Researchers have indicated that students at rural schools experienced homophobic bullying more often than their urban counterparts (Gottschalk & Newton, 2009; Kosciw,

Greytalk, & Diaz, 2009; Kosciw et al., 2012). In addition, there is a lack of information addressing rural, professional school staff's (i.e., teachers, principals, nurses, psychologists, and counselors) experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. Chapter 2 will include a review of the current literature addressing bullying, intervention, staff's attitudes and perceptions, and the staff influence relative to implementation of antibullying intervention strategies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The problem this study addressed was the gap in the literature concerning professional school staff's (i.e., nurses, counselors, psychologists, teachers, administrators, and principals) experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students. The relationship between professional school staff and students is vital in building a supportive and healthy school environment and culture (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Veenstra et al., 2014). Researchers have found that professional school staff's attitudes and perceptions may influence a bullying culture in the school setting, particularly for students who may identify as LGBTQ (Fedewa & Ahn, 2011; Berlan, Corliss, Field, Goodman, & Austin, 2010). Currently, the available research exploring the educational and social situations of LGBTQ students focuses on students' personal experiences of being bullied, the psychological and behavioral effects of bullying, and peer interaction (Berlan et al., 2010; Huebner, Thoma, & Neilands, 2013). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight into and knowledge of professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state.

The literature indicated that LGBTQ students in rural school settings reported higher levels of bullying and harassment due to their sexual orientation (Gottschalk & Newton, 2009; Kosciw, Greytalk, & Diaz, 2009; Kosciw et al., 2012; Poon & Saewyc, 2009). This literature review will include current findings from studies about professional

school staff's influence, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors as they relate to the implementation of school policies and intervention strategies designed to protect students from bullying in the school setting. The literature review will include information about the methods used to find studies using the conceptual framework. In addition, the literature review will include a detailed review of the relevant research and a summary of the chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

The search strategies used to obtain peer-reviewed studies included a review of the databases located in the Walden Library, to include PsycINFO, EBSCO, PsycARTICLES, PsycEXTRAS, PsycTESTS, SocINDEX, and LGBTLife, ProQuest Central, and Sage Journal. In addition, I used Google Scholar to search for articles and websites by typing in key words and phrases, such *as rural school studies, staff attitudes, staff perception, bullying prevention strategies, bullying policy, professional staff support, homosexuality, LGBTQ students, sexual orientation, bullying, teachers, school, collective efficacy, efficacy, and intervention.*

To maintain a flow of current data, I searched articles published between 2012 and 2017. I also used Google Scholar to search for peer-reviewed articles that I could access in Sage online publications. The articles used provided additional references within their text that were less than five years old, and I used those references to search for other peer-reviewed and scholarly articles.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the research was rooted in Bandura's (1997/1998/2005) social cognitive theory. The purpose of using the social cognitive theory to guide this study, was to gain a greater understanding of individual and group motivation when applying Bandura's (1997, 1998, 2005) concepts of self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Empirical research in self-efficacy and collective-efficacy is extensive; however, the literature focusing specifically on rural, professional school staff's attitudes and perceptions and the bullying of LGBTQ students in rural schools, is limited. Bandura used the social cognitive theory to explain how self-efficacy and collective efficacy theories contributed to the understanding of how individuals make decisions and judgments. Both efficacy theories describe how people react to their beliefs about what they have learned from other people and will model those newly learned behaviors. However, there are slight differences between self-efficacy and collective efficacy and how people internally determined responsibility for their actions (Bandura, 2005). For instance, with self-efficacy, the person focused on personal responsibility for their actions, beliefs, and behaviors based on their social environments (Bandura, 2005). With collective efficacy, people assigned responsibility to the social groups or social environments, to which they belonged and justified their actions based on the group as opposed to the self (Bandura, 2005).

Using the social cognitive theory, Bandura (2005) formed a connection between human cognition or knowledge and social learning to explain how human behavior is based on environmental influences and socially learned experiences. Although

individuals experience similar social environments, they will perceive their social environments differently, and because of their different life experiences and emotions, everyone will react differently to similar stimuli (Bandura, 1997/1998/2005). Bandura (2005) also believed that individuals start to develop their sense of positive self-efficacy and collective efficacy as the result of successful, positive vicarious experiences (i.e., learning by observing others successfully completing tasks), and by verbal persuasion (i.e., being encouraged by others to successfully complete tasks). In addition, Bandura (2005) believed that the development of self-efficacy and collective efficacy is also influenced by physiological responses, such as stress or emotions, which may shape their perceptions and experiences. However, individuals who focused on negative consequences or problems generally experienced lower self-efficacy because of their inability to experience success. Therefore, individuals with lower self-efficacy have difficulty moving forward and coping with difficult situations (Bandura, 2005).

Bandura (1997/1998) stated that efficacy beliefs result from the beliefs and cognitions individuals form about themselves and their environments, which ultimately determine how they interface with the world around them (Bandura, 1997). Because of the importance of the environment and social situations, people create and maintain social structures to help guide and maintain development and behavior. Social structures, such as school or work, tend to provide a model for behavior that is displayed by others within the group (i.e., school or work) that is determined to be either acceptable, unacceptable, or expected to occur in a social situation (Bandura, 1997, 1998, 2005). As a result, Bandura (1997) determined that collective efficacy is an important efficacy belief

affecting both the individual and the whole group. Bandura (1997) defines collective efficacy as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce levels of attainment" (p. 477). Collective efficacy beliefs are a specific group's (e.g., family, town, state, school, country, etc.) understanding of the collective norms, values, and expectations within that group, which enable group members to meet various goals and foster a way of life (Bandura, 1997, 1998, 2005). To understand the social phenomenon regarding professional school staff's attitudes and perceptions towards the bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school, I discussed informative, relevant research concerning collective efficacy.

Bandura's (1997, 2005) social cognitive theory provides a framework for understanding professional school staff's attitudes and perceptions toward LGBTQ students and helped to explain how staff's attitudes and perceptions not only influence the implementation of intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state, but intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students across the United States.

Literature Review

Collective Self-Efficacy

Collective efficacy is an area of social cognitive theory that involves group motivation and the likelihood of engaging in certain behaviors and choices (Barchia & Bussey, 2011). When researching group dynamics within a school system, researchers have found connections between collective efficacy and the justification for aggressive behaviors (Barchia & Bussey, 2011). Therefore, in relation to the study, it is possible that

due to the group's collective efficacy, educators and school staff may justify their lack of understanding and willingness to support the LGBTQ students experiencing and reporting bullying, based on the social norm within the rural school system. The utilization of the collective efficacy concept will assist with understanding how school staff relationships with each other, and the climate of the rural high school, may affect the current or future intervention methods used to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students.

Collective Efficacy and School Aggression

Collective efficacy and self-efficacy beliefs play an important role in how people think and, therefore, act (Bandura, 1997/1998/2005; Barchia & Bussey, 2011). Barchia and Bussey (2011) found that by utilizing both cognitive and social structures, individuals developed beliefs about themselves and the people around them. In addition, through social structures, individuals learned how to determine what is accepted and tolerated, and how to interact. Barchia and Bussey researched the connection between self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and moral disengagement in relation to aggression toward peers, which appears important to understanding how collective efficacy can influence an individual's decisions. For example, the research provided by the authors can help to understand how perceptions and attitudes toward LGBTQ students influence school staff. The authors do not address the issue of how individual decisions can lead to specific perceptions and attitudes. However, they build connections between self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and moral disengagement, which appear important in understanding how school staff attitudes toward LGBTQ students can influence intervention strategies toward bullying of LGBTQ students. The researchers recruited a

total of 1,177 participants in Grades 7-10 from 14 different schools in the United States. Surveys were completed in two separate sessions with an interval of eight months between each session (Barchia & Bussey, 2011). Barchia and Bussey utilized measures based on four scales: peer aggression, aggression self-efficacy, moral disengagement, and collective efficacy. Barchia and Bussey (2011) defined moral disengagement as "a self-regulatory mechanism whereby moral self-sanctions are disengaged from moral standards by justifying immoral conduct" (p. 108). The researchers found that participants who were less likely to display a concern for the morals of the group or the rights of others were more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors such as discrimination and bullying (Barchia & Bussey, 2011). Individuals who reported high concern for others were less likely to engage in certain aggressive tendencies such as bullying (Barchia & Bussey, 2011).

Barchia and Bussey (2011) found that the participants who showed collective efficacy between students and teachers were willing to work together with the other students and teachers to create a better school environment, and the participants reported a lower level of aggression. Through collective efficacy, participants who created a belief that discrimination was justifiable when the group was accepting of a negative behavior could protect their self-efficacy by justifying their actions based on societal norms, thereby reducing personal guilt (Bahns & Branscombe, 2011; Barchia & Bussey, 2011). Bandura (1977) believed that, as a social system, a school system is a place where relationships between school staff and student peer groups help develop individual self-efficacy and group collective efficacy that, together, can address major social issues such

as bullying. By evaluating the school system, researchers gain insights into the influence of collective efficacy (Barchia & Busesey, 2011; Veenstra et al. 2014).

Collective Efficacy and School Connectedness

It is important to understand the connection between collective efficacy beliefs and how the physical conditions of the environment, environmental and social resources (i.e., training offered related to LGBTQ student needs), and support from others influence the group's collective efficacy, especially within a school (Angelle & Teague, 2014). The teaching staff's perceptions of how they can perform and the goals they can reach are indicators of their efficacy beliefs (Angelle & Teague, 2014). Belief in the groups' performance, support from other staff or administration to complete tasks, and ability to reach common goals are indicative of the groups' collective efficacy (Angelle & Teague, 2014). Angelle and Teague studied how a group of teachers' collective efficacy affected their feelings about their leadership roles in the school environment. The teaching staff's perceptions of how they perform as leaders and the goals they reach are indicators of their efficacy beliefs (Angelle & Teague, 2014). The authors looked at how administrative support in the school, such as principal support, affected the teachers' perceptions of collective efficacy and their roles as leaders (Angelle & Teague, 2014). Angelle and Teague's study focused on three school districts in one state in the southeastern United States. Using the Teacher Leadership Inventory and the Teacher Efficacy Belief Scale-Collective Form developed by Olivier's work (as cited in Angelle & Teague, 2014), they measured collective efficacy and teacher leadership (Angelle & Teague, 2014). There was a total of 363 participants from all three districts (A, B, and C),

and out of the 363 participants, 31.4% indicated they felt they held leadership roles in the schools. District B had the highest percentage at 42.3% of teachers believing they had leadership roles. In addition, there was a significant difference among the districts regarding the perception of collective efficacy (Angelle & Teague, 2014). The results indicated that District B reported higher levels of leadership roles and a greater sense of collective efficacy, suggesting a correlation between the two variables. The other districts reported lower levels of both variables. The results suggest a correlation between collective efficacy and belief in one's status as a leader in the school (Angelle & Teague, 2014).

Overall, positive collective efficacy beliefs and perception of leadership roles have been positive indicators of teacher satisfaction and job performance (Angelle & Teague, 2014). Angelle and Teague (2014) found that teaching staff who displayed low initiative to engage with peers, share ideas, and collaborate with others, indicated low collective efficacy. Through leadership roles and feelings of connectedness to their colleagues, teachers reported higher levels of collective efficacy and connection to the school districts (Angelle and Teague, 2014). By building collective efficacy of the group and meeting common goals (i.e., the protection of LGBTQ students), teaching staff can feel empowered to engage in collaborative and preventive measures to address school bullying (Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci, & Kilinc, 2012).

Collective Efficacy and School Leadership

In every school and group, leadership plays an important role. Within the school system, the administration, e.g., the principals, are the leaders to whom the teaching staff

turn for guidance and reassurance (Calik et al., 2012). Calik et al. conducted research to understand how the effects of leadership (i.e., school principals) affect the self-efficacy and collective efficacy among teaching staff. Calik et al. believed positive leadership skills resulted in higher levels of perceived self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Calik et al. obtained 328 participants from public, primary classrooms and used a Teacher's Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (as cited in Calik et al., 2012), a Collective Efficacy Scale developed by Goddard et al. (as cited in Calik et al., 2012), and an Instructional Leadership Scale developed by Sisman (as cited in Calik et al., 2012), to understand the relationship between instructional leadership from principals and teachers perceived self-efficacy and collective efficacy. The results indicated significant relationships between instructional leadership, self-efficacy, and collective efficacy. The instructional leadership of the principals served as an antecedent for increasing collective efficacy (Calik et al., 2012).

In addition, Calik et al. (2012) found that positive leadership behaviors, such as supporting the teaching staff and sharing similar visions for the school, played an important role in teaching staff's self-efficacy by having a positive model to follow. When teaching staff's perception of self-efficacy increased, their job performance and collective efficacy also increased (Calik et al., 2012). What Calik et al. uncovered was that positive and active leadership from the principals provided teaching staff with the support necessary to demonstrate a significant increase in staff's self-efficacy and collective efficacy. By improving the self-efficacy of the teaching staff, the achievement

of the school's academic goals, student attendance, and student performance rates are more likely to improve (Calik et al., 2012).

As Calik et al. (2012) discovered that leadership roles could affect teaching staff's self-efficacy, Smith, Osgood, Caldwell, Hynes, and Perkins (2013) found positive belief in collective efficacy between staff and students improved students' behavior towards one another. When student participants in the study understood that school staff would not tolerate bullying behavior, the students felt empowered and increased their collective efficacy to work against bullying situations (Smith et al., 2013).

Moreover, the researchers indicated that improved collective efficacy among the adults in a school setting was a contributing factor to reducing the students' aggressive behaviors (Smith et al., 2013). Smith et al. found a significant relationship between teaching staff engaging in interventions against bullying and an increased sense of belonging reported by the students. Smith et al. further reported an increase in the students' overall sense of collective efficacy and positive behaviors in the school setting (i.e., engaging in antibullying steps and improved academics). When teaching staff provided consistent implementation of bullying interventions, and openly voiced their expectations regarding bullying, the children were able to build their sense of collective efficacy and improve behavioral choices by feeling a sense of connectedness to the teaching staff and other students (Smith et al., 2013). In general, school staff reported that collective efficacy plays a role in how their collective attitudes can maintain the school environment, assist in the implementation of bullying interventions, and advocate for

needed support from senior administrators (Barchia & Bussey, 2011; Calik et al., 2012; Skinner, Babinski, & Gifford, 2014; Smith et al., 2013; Veenstra et al., 2014).

School Staff and LGBTQ Preventive and Intervention Practices

In a study conducted by O'Connell et al. (2010), rural school staff displayed negative attitudes toward LGBTQ students. Although teaching staff displayed negative attitudes toward LGBTQ students, reporting a lack of education regarding LGBTQ students that influenced teacher perceptions in the O'Connell et al. study, the researchers also found that teaching staff displayed a positive attitude toward wanting to help LGBTQ students, which could lead to positive outcomes for the LGBTQ victims of bullying. Alexander, Santo, Cunha, Weber, and Russell (2011) explored the relationship between the students' perceptions of teachers' positive attitudes toward victimized students (i.e., LGBTQ students) and the students' perceptions of teaching staff's commitment to reducing bullying. The research focused on the relationship between the outcome of antibullying interventions and the students' perceptions of teachers' openness about their discriminatory attitudes and lack of commitment to their schools. Participants in the study consisted of 684 students from the state of Parana, Brazil with ages ranging from 11 to 18 years. Alexander et al. utilized the Brazil Preventing School Harassment Survey, based on the California Safe Schools Coalition (as cited in Alexander et al. 2011). The measures for this survey included: school commitment, the perception of teachers' support, the perception of teachers' discrimination, homophobic victimization, non-homophobic victimization, and general peer victimization (as cited in Alexander et al., 2011). Alexander et al. found that negative teacher perceptions toward LGBTQ

students positively correlated with the homophobic victimization measures (i.e., name-calling, threats, and exclusion) utilized. Results indicated that students who experienced frequent homophobic victimization demonstrated less school commitment in comparison to those who experienced other forms of victimization, such as victimization related to ethnicity or race (Alexander et al., 2011). In addition, students who could find teachers to support them with their reports of homophobic victimization reported a higher level of academic commitment in comparison to students who felt teachers held negative views toward them (Alexander et al., 2011). Alexander et al. found that, with additional support from school staff, LGBTQ students can complete academics and graduate from high school.

Veenstra, Lindenberg, Huitsing, Sainio, and Salmivalli (2014) measured antibullying attitudes among teachers and students, and how the antibullying attitudes affected student-reported experiences of bullying. Veenstra et al. recruited 2,776 students from 31 Finish and Swedish schools and 144 classrooms on mainland Finland. Students filled out a survey administered by the teachers after following detailed instructions (Veenstra et al., 2014). Veenstra et al. found that when teachers' self-efficacy and antibullying attitudes were high, students reported fewer bullying incidents. In addition, when teachers' self-efficacy and antibullying attitudes were high, teaching staff were more involved in antibullying intervention strategies and prevention strategies. The increase in teacher self-efficacy and implementation of antibullying attitudes affected the effort to stop bullying, resulting in the development of personal antibullying attitudes by some students (Veenstra et al., 2014). Veenstra et al. (2014) and Alexander et al. (2011)

are among a few researchers whose research provided support for improving teachers' job-satisfaction through development of personal self-efficacy, thereby improving teachers' and staff's overall work performance and reducing school bullying (Calik et al., 2012; Skinner et al., 2014). However, there is still limited research in this area.

School Staff Beliefs, Attitudes, Self-Efficacy, and Collective Efficacy

McIntyre (2009) recruited eight Scottish teachers from Dumfries and asked their perceptions of LGBTQ students, including their knowledge of the barriers LGBTQ students faced. The participants' interviews consisted of questions about LGBTQ concerns within the school, such as if LGBTQ students should be included in the body of the antibullying policies, number of incidents of homophobic bullying in the school, how bullying should be addressed in the school, and any barriers that may exist to effectively address homophobic bullying. The researcher also asked the participants about their perceptions of the barriers the LGBTQ student faced, such as bullying or lack of support from staff in the school (McIntyre, 2009). McIntyre found that teaching staff often do not have the language or knowledge to engage in discussions about LGBTQ students and their needs. The Scottish teaching staff, believing they were building equality between the LGBTQ students and non-LGBTQ students, described LGBTQ students as "pupils who are 'the same as' heterosexual pupils" to explain sexual orientation to the other students (McIntyre, 2009, p. 309). In addition to lacking the knowledge or resources to help LGBTQ students feel safe and comfortable in the school setting, McIntyre (2009) found that many teachers were fearful or resistant to explaining the differences that exist between LGBTQ students and non-LGBTQ students: "The child who exhibits atypical

gender behavior is expected to change to fit into the system" (McIntyre, 2009, p. 310). McIntyre (2009) found that fearful or resistant attitudes and patterns of thinking among the teachers resulted in teachers providing limited support to the LGBTQ students, instead placing expectations on LGBTQ students to resist acknowledging who they are which encourages discrimination and bullying toward them.

School staff's comfort, motivation, and attitudes affect the way each school staff member will react and respond to a bullying situation (Calik et al., 2012; McIntyre, 2009; Skinner et al., 2014). Kolbert et al. (2015) examined how school educators perceive the support provided to LGBT students in a school system and the perceptions of bullying in the schools based on that perceived support. In addition, Kolbert et al. (2015) measured how antibullying policies affected teachers' perceptions of bullying toward LGBT students. Participants included 200 teachers from 42 different school districts in Southwest Pennsylvania (Kolbert et al., 2015). Seventy-one percent of teachers were female, and 81.3% reported their race/ethnicity as white. In addition, 14 (7%) of the participants indicated a sexual orientation that was different from "straight," 5% of individuals indicating they were "Gay/Lesbian" and 2% as "Bisexual" (Kolbert et al., 2015, p. 253). A 35-question survey was developed to address educators' perceptions about LGBTQ bullying, support of LGBTQ students within the school, and policies related to LGBTQ bullying (Kolbert et al., 2015). The teachers in the study reported that 51.5% of their schools' policies always supported their students and 33% reported that school policies frequently supported their student regardless of gender expression (Kolbert et al., 2015). However, teachers also reported that LGTBQ students were more

likely to report higher victimization of LGBT students compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Kolbert et al., 2015). Kolbert et al. also found a correlation between lack of teacher support and an increase in the use of derogatory language by both teachers' and peers' physical and verbal abuse, sexual harassment, and cyberbullying (i.e., bullying online or via electronic devices; Kolbert et al., 2015).

There were conflicting results. The non-LGBT teachers stated there was support within the school system for the LGBT community; however, the teachers, who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, reported a lack of support and a lack of concern when bullying or discrimination of LGBTQ students was occurring (Kolbert et al., 2015, p. 256). Kolbert et al. found that 51% of the participants claimed their schools did not have antibullying policies for LGBTQ students. However, Kolbert at al found that many of the schools included in the study had general antibullying policies in place. The lack of knowledge displayed by the teaching staff may contribute to problems with administration oversight or a lack of training regarding the characteristics and needs of the LGBTQ student population (Kolbert et al., 2015).

Skinner, Babinski, and Gifford (2014) measured how school climate, teacher self-efficacy, barriers within the school (i.e., lack of training resources), and level of principal support affected the intervention programs used to assess bully management to help bullied victims. Skinner et al. (2014) used the Teacher Expectation and Efficacy Measure (TEEM) developed by Howard, Horn, and Joliff (as cited in Skinner et al., 2014). In addition, there were two vignettes developed from Horne, Socherman, & Dagley (as cited in Skinner et al., 2014) and Howard, Horn, and Joliff (as cited in Skinner et al., 2014).

Skinner et al. utilized follow-up questions with 236 sixth grade teachers from 37 schools in North Carolina, Illinois, Georgia, and Virginia. In addition, four subscales were used in the Schools and Staffing survey to measure school climate (Skinner et al., 2015). The four subscales included: "high-risk behaviors, barriers to learning, principal support, and cooperation among teachers" (Skinner et al., 2015, p. 77). Skinner et al. surveyed the teachers to determine how the teachers would respond to a bully and a victim in different situations. The researchers found that school climate affected teachers' response to both bullies and victims, and when principal support was provided, teachers' efforts to reduce bullying behaviors and teacher self-efficacy improved (Skinner et al., 2014). The results indicated that with perceived principal support, teacher satisfaction and teachers' ability to solve problems improved (Skinner et al., 2014). The research of Skinner et al. is invaluable because it examined an understudied population (i.e., urban school administrators), identified the lack of research on the topic, and demonstrated the need to further develop research on LGBTQ youth.

In a more recent study, Rinehart and Espelage (2016) conducted a multilevel analysis of school climate to understand how the school climate affects victimization of the student. Rinehart and Espelage studied the school environment to measure teacher/staff demographics, level of student intervention, level of staff intervention, school commitment to prevention of bullying, positive teacher-staff-student interactions, gender equity or intolerance of sexual harassment, and student measures that recorded student participation in homophobic name-calling and victimization. There was a total of 24 schools with students, teachers and other staff participants from Illinois and 12 schools

from Kansas included in the study. The researchers found that students were experiencing homophobic and sexual harassment (31.3% name-calling; 14.8% sexual harassment; Rinehart & Espelage, 2016, p. 217). When reviewing the results, the researchers found that teachers reported an increase in bullying prevention in their schools if the teaching staff felt they had administrative support. In instances where teachers received higher levels of administrative support, the students reported fewer instances of homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment. Overall, the researchers found positive associations between teacher and staff's commitment to bullying prevention and a decrease in sexual harassment (Rinehart & Espelage, 2016, p. 218).

Discrimination and Bullying in the US Education System

Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, and Sadek (2010) defined bullying as "a distinct type of aggression characterized by a repeated and systematic abuse of power" (p. 65). The dynamics of bullying and a bullying environment can influence both the perpetrator and the victim (Cook et al., 2010). Specifically, the bullying of LGBTQ students could lead to ongoing problems, such as truancy, lack of academic achievement, and social withdrawal within the school system because of bullying experiences and an overall perceived lack of support from teachers, administration, and other school staff (Berlan et al., 2010; Fedewa & Ahn, 2011; Huebner, Thoma, & Neilands, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012).

Cook et al. (2010) examined bullies, victims, and victims that chose to bully as well as the predictors for bullying behaviors (i.e., name-calling, verbal threats, physical attacks) that could possibly assist in identifying prevention and intervention methods.

Cook et al. engaged in a meta-analytic investigation, reviewing articles between 1970 and 2006 to identify pre-existing studies focused on bullying perpetrators and victims of bullying within the school system. The researchers utilized electronic data-bases to add important descriptors, such as “bully” and “victim” (p. 68). Cook et al. found 153 articles that met the criteria for bullies and victims in the school system. Cook et al. coded the 153 articles to analyze the outcomes of bullying behavior and victim experiences. Cook et al. indicated that a bully has significant behavioral issues, internal/emotional struggles, difficulties in social situations, academic issues, and negative beliefs about others.

Cook et al. (2010) found that both victims and bullies experience psychological and social maladjustment followed by psychosocial challenges, such as psychiatric disorders and criminal behavior. Cook et al. discussed the psychological reasons why a student decides to become a bully and the social implications of bullying. They found that a bully appears to have a potential for an increase in externalized behaviors, which are actions that are not being controlled and viewed as non-compliant, aggressive, violent, or disruptive. Moreover, researchers found externalized behaviors to be a significant indicator for bullying behavior compared to other areas, such as self-related cognitions. The authors reported that the victims suffer from many psychological and social problems because of bullying. A victim can experience psychological disorders, low self-esteem, depression, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, and increased fear. In addition, victims of bullying have been known to engage in extreme protective measures, such as carrying weapons.

LGBTQ Students and their Experiences with Bullying

Given current ongoing social and environmental stressors, growing up and identifying as LGBTQ is often difficult and can even be traumatic for some adolescents (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2008; Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2013; Huebner, Thoma, & Neilands, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012). D'Augelli et al. interviewed 528 self-identified LGBTQ youth between the ages of 15 to 19 in New York City. The LGBTQ youth participated in three interviews during a two-year span, utilizing a sexual orientation development milestone survey, a gender conformity scale developed by Hockingberry and Billingham (as cited in D'Augelli et al., 2008), the Rosenberg self-esteem survey developed by Rosenberg (as cited in D'Augelli et al., 2008), and the revised homosexuality attitudes inventory developed by Shidlo (as cited in D'Augelli et al., 2008). Sixty percent of the male participants and 52% of the female participants reported that a peer, or someone they knew, suggested that they were different from their peers. The adolescent and young adult participants identified as LGBTQ reported not fitting into established gender norms (D'Augelli et al., 2008). Seventy-seven percent of the males and 72% of the females indicated they started to feel different from their peers during childhood (D'Augelli et al., 2008, p. 131). Though the participants did not know there was a difference in their sexual orientation during childhood compared to other non-LGBTQ children, many participants reported they were negatively labeled by their peers due to not conforming to typical gender norms (D'Augelli et al., 2008). Findings indicated that LGBTQ individuals report feeling pressured to fit in and follow typical gender norms (D'Augelli et al., 2008; Heck et al., 2013; Huebner et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012).

Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, and Russell (2010) conducted a study to further understand how gender nonconformity contributes to youths' psychosocial adjustment. The researchers recruited 245 LGBT young adults to participate in the Family Acceptance Project's young adult survey to measure gender nonconformity, school victimization, and life-satisfaction (Toomey et al., 2010). Toomey et al. found that gender nonconformity significantly positively correlated with LGBT youths' experiences of school victimization, which negatively affected the youths' development and life-satisfaction. The researchers reported that LGBT participants had decreased feelings of satisfaction and quality of life because of their experiences of homophobic bullying (Toomey et al., 2010).

For some LGBTQ youths, the ongoing victimization and bullying, because of gender nonconformity and sexual identity, can lead to diminished self-esteem, internalized homophobia, and mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety (Berlan et al., 2010; D'Augelli et al., 2008; Kosciw et al., 2012; Toomey et al., 2010). D'Augelli et al. (2008) reported youth experience pressures from society, peers, parents, teachers, and school staff to fit into typical gender norms. Parents, teachers, peers, and society, in general, contribute significantly to the developmental and psychological concerns among the LGBTQ youth community (D'Augelli et al., 2008; Kosciw et al., 2012; Toomey et al., 2010).

Bahns and Branscombe (2011) conducted an online discussion with 167 undergraduate, heterosexual males to measure the relationship between the reinforcement of bullying behavior toward LGBTQ individuals compared to the reinforcement of

positive attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals. The study utilized an adapted version of a harassment computer program. The participants were told that they would be reviewing a blog with another participant online regarding "heterosexual privilege" (Bahns & Branscombe, 2011, p. 390) as it compared to homosexual rights and experiences (i.e., "I have heterosexual privilege if I can publicly display affection toward my loved one without fear of harassment or attack"; Bahns & Branscombe, 2011, p. 390). The participants were told they would have an opportunity to respond to the blog. The first part of the research design measured whether the participant agreed to heterosexual privilege as it was presented in the blog (Bahns & Branscombe, 2011, p. 390). Finally, the researchers engaged the participants in an online conversation with a person they thought was down the hall. The online partner was alternately described as either gay or straight during the discussion (Bahns & Branscombe, 2011). The situation measured whether there was or was not justification for discrimination toward LGBTQ individuals. Bahns and Branscombe found that there was a significant "effect of legitimacy of discrimination" (p.392) from the participants who found it acceptable to discriminate against LGBTQ individuals because it was perceived as socially justified, compared to the "illegitimate discrimination" group. The researchers discovered that when harassment and bullying are perceived as justified, heterosexual men are likely to display aggression or homophobia toward LGBTQ individuals (Bahns & Branscombe, 2011). In addition, participants reported an increase in feeling justified to discriminate against a homosexual group when the participant was provided a reason to discriminate (Bahns & Branscombe, 2011).

Bahns and Branscombe (2011) argued that involvement in a group (i.e., heterosexual males) that discriminates against another specific group (i.e., homosexual males) creates perceived justification for the discrimination on an individual level, allowing for a lack of guilt when using discriminatory expressions, such as telling anti-gay jokes or "statements offensive to gay people" (p.390). When there is no perceived justification for discrimination, the discriminating group may experience "collective guilt, which is an aversive emotion that is experienced when the ingroup is perceived to be responsible for harming a relevant outgroup," and the discriminating group will likely discontinue the behavior (Bahns & Branscombe, 2011, pp. 389). When collective guilt was not present, the participants justified discrimination within the group and, at times, promoted discrimination through social acceptance (i.e., laughing, encouraging others to discriminate, or engaging in the discrimination) (Bahns & Branscombe, 2011). According to Bandura (1997/1998) and Bahns and Branscombe (2011), when heterosexual individuals feel justified participating in discrimination and bullying of LGBTQ individuals or students, it creates unsafe situations and increases negative experiences for the LGBTQ individual/student. According to the results of the research of Bandura (1997/1998), Bahns and Branscombe (2011), and Barchia and Bussey (2011), teachers and other school staff may justify their decisions to ignore or belittle the claims of LGBTQ students because of the overall collective efficacy of their group.

School Climate in Relation to LGBTQ Bullying

LGBTQ youth in American schools have reported being bullied verbally and assaulted physically because of their sexual orientations (Berlan et al., 2010; Fedewa &

Ahn, 2011; Huebner, Thoma, & Neilands, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012; Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz, 2009). Kosciw et al. (2009) conducted a study to evaluate the treatment of LGBT students in American schools and communities throughout the United States using 5,420 LGBT students between the ages of 13 and 21. A Likert scale was used to measure responses to questions, which focused on biased language, victimization, demographics and location, community-level, and school district characteristics (Kosciw et al., 2009). The results indicated that older LGBT youth were less likely to hear homophobic remarks compared to their younger counterparts, and youths in urban areas were significantly less likely to hear homophobic remarks when compared to youths in rural areas (Kosciw et al., 2009). Areas with higher poverty rates showed an increase in the likelihood of experiencing victimization compared to areas with more college-educated adults (Kosciw et al., 2009).

Students in urban areas have reported significant differences related to bullying experiences based on sexual orientation and gender expression in comparison to their rural counterparts (Kosciw et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2012). Research about school climates has indicated that there are discrepancies between urban and rural school climates regarding the treatment of LGBTQ students (Kosciw et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2012). There is also a lack of information regarding how rural school climates, such as school staff attitudes and intervention programs, influence bullying behaviors toward LGBTQ students (Kosciw et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2012). Moreover, school climate problems, such as victimization and bullying toward LGBTQ students, have been associated with mental health and behavioral problems, truancy problems, and even

suicidality among the LGBTQ student population (Berlan et al., 2010; Birkett et al., 2009; Fedewa & Ahn, 2011; Huebner et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012).

Rural School Climate and Bullying

Birkett et al. (2009) used the Dane County Middle School Survey, developed by Koenig, Espelage, and Biendseil (2005), on 7,376 seventh and eighth graders from a Midwestern county school to measure the school's climate. The researchers used a survey to determine if the students felt "they are getting a good education if they are respected," and if they feel safe (Birkett et al., 2009, p. 993). Overall, if the student felt he or she was in a supportive and helpful school environment, the student would have lower rates of drug use, mental health concerns and suicidal issues, and truancy difficulties (Birkett et al., 2009, p. 997). In comparison, students in perceived negative environments displayed an increased risk in the areas of drug use, truancy, depression and suicide attempts, especially among questioning youth (Birkett et al., 2009). The similarity between heterosexual and LGBTQ students' reports of a positive climate is noteworthy and is indicative of how the school environment is crucial in the treatment and interactions of the youths in educational settings (Birket et al., 2009).

Gottschalk and Newton (2009) conducted a study in the Grampians Region of Victoria in Australia about school climate and found that the rural school climate created distress, fear, and even violence for many homosexual individuals owing to the lack of diversity, traditional values, and the lack of LGB resources such as LGB support groups. Gottschalk and Newton recruited 95 individuals between the ages of 17 and 59 years to complete an unlabeled questionnaire. They were asked to respond to (a) an interview

about the treatment of lesbians and gay men in rural areas and (b) how the treatment from their rural communities affected their well-being. Both lesbians and gay men reported frequent experiences of homophobia when interacting with their family, co-workers, community members, school peers and staff, and healthcare professionals (Gottschalk & Newton, 2009). Seventy-eight percent of lesbians and gay men reported being aware of another lesbian or gay person experiencing abuse or discrimination (Gottschalk & Newton, 2009). Some participants recalled acts of violence, hate crimes, and rape because of their sexual orientation. The researchers found that gay and questioning males reported more incidents of victimization compared to lesbian participants (Gottschalk & Newton, 2009). In addition, participants reported that their teachers were not accepting of homosexual students and that the teaching staff was as negatively aggressive toward homosexuals as were peers in the participants' schools (Gottschalk & Newton, 2009). Although Gottschalk and Newton (2009) conducted their study in another country, it was significant because it replicated other studies in the United States (D'Augelli et al., 2008; Heck et al., 2013; Huebner et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012). The findings showed that discrimination and bullying of LGBTQ students, in their schools and communities, is ongoing (D'Augelli et al., 2008; Heck et al., 2013; Huebner et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012).

In the United States, the school system plays a critical role in youths' personal development (D'Augelli et al., 2008; Heck et al., 2013; Huebner et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012). For LGBTQ youth, though, the experiences within a school system are often not positive (D'Augelli et al., 2008; Heck et al., 2013; Huebner et al., 2013; Kosciw et

al., 2012). O'Connell, Atlas, Saunders, and Phillbrick (2010) conducted an exploratory investigation to examine the attitudes and perceptions of school staff regarding LGBTQ students, including the teaching staff's perceptions of available services for marginalized youths and staff's willingness to engage in professional development training to support LGBTQ students in the school. The participants were 653 professionals from rural areas in New York State (O'Connell et al., 2010). O'Connell et al. developed a 26-item self-report, *Attitudes Toward Minority Groups*, to measure perceptions of the teaching staff toward LGBTQ youth compared to other marginalized groups. O'Connell et al. found that teachers' perceptions of LGBTQ students were significantly more negative when compared to other marginalized students.

Although the teaching staff's attitudes were more negative toward LGBTQ students compared to other groups of marginalized students, 93.6% of the teachers indicated feeling comfortable with LGBTQ students, and more than 80% stated they would be willing to discuss problems regarding LGBTQ youth with others (O'Connell et al., 2010). In addition, 78.5% of the teachers stated they were willing to attend a workshop to build skills and understanding of the needs of LGBTQ students (O'Connell et al., 2010). Although almost all participants stated they felt comfortable working with the LGBTQ population, there was a limited number of participants who were willing to further their knowledge regarding the LGBTQ student population and intervention methods (O'Connell et al., 2010). In addition, the researchers indicated that rural areas do not have sufficient resources to support LGBTQ individuals such as safe places within the schools for LGBTQ students. Lastly, the research showed a lack of support from rural

communities. Participants in previous research studies have indicated a lack of knowledge about LGBTQ students (D'Augelli et al., 2008; Heck et al., 2013; Huebner et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012), which could lead to negative perceptions; however, O'Connell et al. opened the channels for research regarding school staff attitudes in rural areas.

Summary and Conclusion

Research has been limited regarding understanding the rural school context and how all components of the school, such as school staff, students' peer group, and school policy, are affecting the lives of the LGBTQ student. Most research has focused on LGBTQ youth, bullies, intervention plans, and, in some instances, the teaching staff (Andreou, Didaskalou, & Vlachou, 2008; Berlan, Corliss, Field, Goodman, & Austin, 2010; Huebner, Thoma, & Neilands, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012; O'Connell et al., 2010). There have been some research conducted on the role of the teaching staff, other school staff, and school environment in bullying of and discrimination against LGBTQ youth (Bahns & Branscombe, 2011; Barchia & Bussey, 2011; Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Gottschalk & Newton, 2009; O'Connell et al., 2010). However, there are still gaps that exist within the literature that need to be addressed.

O'Connell et al. (2010) found that many school professionals, especially teachers, hold negative attitudes toward LGBTQ students. Although some teaching staff claim they are willing to become more active within their schools in addressing the needs of the LGBTQ students, there appear to be few among the teaching staff that are motivated to initiate changes by participating in training to understand LGBTQ needs. In addition,

there appeared to be a lack of application of intervention programs to prevent bullying or assisting with the development of intervention programs (O'Connell et al., 2010). The research also indicated there was a lack of involvement with the LGBTQ students in the school such as through support groups (O'Connell et al., 2010). There is limited research on what causes negative attitudes toward LGBTQ students among the school staff and what factors contribute to their persistence within the school environment. In addition, there is a gap in the research addressing the connection between school staff attitudes and perceptions and how they might influence the implementation of intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students.

Chapter 3 includes the methodology and research questions. Chapter 3 also includes the use of a qualitative case study design. The chapter will include a description of the sample population, interview questions and information, school observations, documentation review, and ethical considerations. In addition, chapter 3 will address the methods for collecting and analyzing the data.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight into and knowledge of professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. Berlan et al. (2010) and Huebner et al. (2013) noted that the unsupportive attitudes of professional school staff have a direct effect on the implementation of schools' bullying intervention strategies, programs, and policies, which negatively affect LGBTQ students' school experiences. The potential insight and knowledge gained from this study could provide professional school staff with a greater understanding of how their attitudes and perceptions influence the implementation of intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying towards all students.

This chapter included a detailed discussion of the research design and rationale, and the role of the researcher. In addition, this chapter included the methodology section, which includes the logic behind participant selection, instrumentation, and the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. The chapter also included information about the data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and a summary of the main points of the chapter.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state?

Subquestions

1. What are the professional school staff's attitudes towards implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state?
2. How do professional school staff perceive their experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state?

Research Design and Rationale

The research design selected for this qualitative study was a case study. According to Yin (2014), a case study is defined as "an inquiry that (1) investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within the real-world context, especially when (2) the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 16). To respond to the research question: What are the professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state, I selected a single case study design to evaluate the professional staff at a rural high school in a northeastern state. In addition, a qualitative case study allowed me to observe the

participants during the interview process to better gauge how the participants are feeling and their behavioral responses to the interview questions?

Role of the Researcher

The role of a researcher was to act as a link between the topic of the research and the individuals, information, and observations to obtain an understanding of the phenomenon under study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldana, 2016). Ravitch and Carl also noted that in qualitative research, the researchers serve as the primary instruments in the research process. For this qualitative study, I conducted interviews with the participants, observed them during the interview process to look for emotional and behavioral responses, and documented what the participants reported and what I observed. I analyzed the data to gain more insight into and knowledge of the professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state?

Throughout the research process, it was important that I stayed aware of my personal bias. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), researchers' educational backgrounds, personal experiences, and opinions about the topic, could affect the research findings and analysis. Professionally, I currently work in the Pennsylvania state school system as a Mobile Therapist and Behavior Specialist Consultant. My relationship to the project could affect how I view the school selected for the recruitment of participants. In addition, there could be a personal bias based on my observations of how teachers handle bullying complaints from students. I addressed this concern of bias by

performing the study at a selected school located in a northeastern state, where I do not have any connections or relationships with potential participants.

In relation to personal biases, there were a few that I considered. Growing up, I attended a rural high school in a northeastern state. I openly identified as a lesbian student in the ninth grade. During part of my high school experience, I was bullied, harassed, and threatened on a weekly basis. I was the only student, except for one male who later openly identified as gay and a part of the LGBTQ community. The bullying, I experienced, could cause personal bias as I progress through this study. To address potential bias, I took recommendations from the work of Ravitch and Carl (2016) and Yin (2014). Ravitch, Carl, and Yin recommend that I, as the researcher, continuously collaborate with my dissertation committee to ensure the research questions, findings, and analysis of the data were not biased.

Participant Selection Logic

According to the work of Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2002), the participants selected for this qualitative case study consisted of nine professional school staff from a rural high school in a northeastern state. Mason (2010) suggested that by keeping qualitative sampling sizes small, the study is less time consuming, more practical, and the researcher could eliminate repetitive data. For this qualitative case study sampling method, I utilized a nonprobability sample design with a purposeful sampling strategy because it placed special importance on strategically and purposefully selecting participants to respond to the research question with insight and in-depth understanding into the area being discussed, such as school staff with a few years of experience to speak

to the research questions (Ravitch & Carl 2016). To select participants, who met the recommended criteria, strategically and purposefully, I used a criterion sample (Patton, 2002). The selected criteria was as follow: all participants must be professional school staff (i.e., teacher, principal, nurse, secretary, psychologist, counselor, or administrator), have three or more years of experience within the secondary educational field, have experience with policies and programs designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students, and have knowledge of reported cases of bullying of LGBTQ students at the school (see Appendix B).

To determine if the prospective participants met the criteria, I included the criteria information in the introduction email accompanied by the informed consent form (see Appendix C). When prospective participants returned the signed informed consent form, I accepted that they were truthful about meeting the criteria. The sampling strategy for the study was suitable because the criteria for the study ensures that all participants met the desired standards. In addition, all participants had experiences within the educational system and had some experiences with bullying.

Instrumentation

For this qualitative case study, the method of collecting data came from in-depth interviews with professional school staff from a rural high school in a northeastern state, data collected from my observation of participants during the interview process, and I reviewed the school's bullying policy and procedure document. The in-depth interviews consisted of questions related to the perceptions and attitudes of the professional school

staff toward LGBTQ students and their' experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students.

The researcher-designed interview questions were modeled after questions from a study conducted by Worthington, Dillon, and Becker-Schutte in 2005 titled: *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Knowledge and Attitude Scale for Heterosexuals (LGBT-KASH).* I altered the tested and approved quantitative survey statements by Worthington et al. (2005) to develop qualitative interview questions, which my dissertation committee reviewed and approved. Modeling previously tested statements, such as *I try not to let my negative belief about homosexuals harm my relationships with LGB people*, allowed me to change the statement into the interview question for this study *How do your attitudes and perceptions about homosexuality influence your relationships with LGBTQ students?* The verification of similar questions, tested in the Worthington et al. study, provided the content of the interview questions for this study and provided additional validity from the Worthington et al. study already being validated by the authors.

The Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection Procedures

The recruitment sample consisted of professional and administrative school staff from a rural high school in a northeastern state. I recruited professional school staff who had experience within the secondary educational field, with policies and programs designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students and had knowledge of reported cases of bullying of LGBTQ students at the school. The recruitment, participation, and data collection procedures for this case study were as follows: I emailed the letter of cooperation to selected schools within the rural high school districts in a northeastern

state to receive permission from the principal(s) to conduct the study and recruit participants. Once a principal within the rural high school district in a northeastern state provided the permission needed to conduct the study at the selected school, I worked with the principal to recruit professional school staff, within that school.

I had the principal, of the selected school, email potential professional school staff the initial contact message (see Appendix A) and the informed consent form. The initial contact message included a prescribed numerical pseudonym to use as the participant's identifier, information about the purpose of the research, the criteria for participating in the study (see Appendix A), an example of the type of research questions to expect (see Appendix C), and an informed consent form. After prospective participants received the information and met the study's criteria, they electronically signed the informed consent form with their individually prescribed numerical identifier and emailed the informed consent forms back to me. By signing the informed consent form, the participants confirmed that they met the prescribed criteria and agreed to participate in the study. After receiving the informed consent forms, the participants and I set up appropriate days and times for their individual and private interviews.

I interviewed the participants face-to-face in a private conference room at the selected school and voice-recorded the interview responses to the semi-structured, in-depth interview questions using Quick Time Player on my MacBook Pro Laptop computer. Baxter and Jack (2008), Creswell (2013), and Merriam (2002) recommended that interview questions should be open-ended and bias free. I informed the participants that their responses are confidential and that they will receive a copy of the signed

informed consent. Creswell (2013) and Patton (2002) explained that each participant's privacy must be maintained and protected. Before the interviews begin, I informed participants about their right to privacy, the purpose of the study, and their right to end the interview or to end their participation in the study at any time. I also informed the participants about the interview process including the method of recording, saving, and protecting their oral responses.

After each interview, I checked the quality of the recorded interview for clarity, saved the interview onto a password-protected external hard drive, and rechecked the saved interview to make sure it was accessible and clear before deleting the original voice-recorded data from the recording device. Creswell (2009) explained that when the interviews conclude, the data is collected, and the participants are ready to exit the study, the researcher will debrief the participants, while informing them of any further steps that will follow the interviews. In addition, the participants received a guarantee that their anonymity was protected, before explaining the debriefing document (see Appendix D). During the debriefing, the participants received a list of support resources (see Appendix D) in case they experience any sort of stress or hardship because of their participation in the study.

Once I completed transcribing his or her responses to the interview questions, the participants had the opportunity to review that transcription to ensure all the information they shared was accurate. If the participants identified any problems with the transcripts, I offered a follow-up with the participants to clarify issues, revise the transcript, save the updated transcripts to the password-protected external hard-drive, and resend the

transcripts to the participants to gain approval to move forward. After the participants completed and reviewed all the needed changes to the transcripts, I informed them that their parts in the study was completed. I completed the exiting process by informing participants of their ethical rights to withdraw from the study, about the support resources listed on the informed consent form and debriefing document, about data retention and continued confidentiality, and that they will receive a summary of the findings, via email, once the study is approved for publishing.

Data Analysis Plan

I utilized interviews, observations, and the high school's bullying policy and procedure document to answer the research question: What are the professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state? I used an application called Trint to upload and transcribe the transcripts. I also used NVivo, which is a coding software program that assisted with organizing, transcribing, and coding audio interviews and documents (QSR International, 2017). Once the responses from the interviews were transcribed and organized, I provided a copy to each of the participants to review for accuracy. Once the participants agreed that the transcripts were accurate, I utilized NVivo to start coding the transcripts by developing key categories and themes to analyze the data from the interviews. In addition, if there were data that showed discrepancies, I would have evaluated and discussed this data with the participants who provided the discrepant information through follow-up questions for clarity.

Saldana (2016) noted that when analyzing and coding interview questions for themes, the researcher should follow systematic steps in the data analysis process. The five steps used in this study were as follows: a) organize and prepare data for analysis; b) organize data on a sheet of paper in two different categories, placing interview question in the left column and participants' responses in the right column; c) read over the data again and look for similarities and differences to get a general sense of the information and to identify repetitive words; d) code by organizing and grouping similar data into categories to recognize trends, identify similar words, and discover new themes; and e) categorize the inductive category and the participants' responses by identifying similar concepts, developing specific codes to categorize responses, identify subcategories to assimilate information into new data findings until saturation is reached. According to Kolb (2012) saturation occurs when new information, themes, or patterns no longer emerge from the data.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Reliability and Validity

Issues of reliability and validity are common concerns in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). According to Ravitch and Carl, some scholars in the scientific community scrutinize qualitative research because qualitative researchers conduct studies using subjective open-ended interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The reliability and validity concerns arose from qualitative research results because the data findings come from less traditional forms of data collection, do not have specific formulae to analyze the data, and focus on the real-world experiences of the participants (Ravitch & Carl,

2016). To ameliorate the reliability and validity concerns of the scholars in the scientific community, researchers like Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba (1985) developed techniques that could build validity or trustworthiness. In qualitative research, validity refers to "the ways that researchers can affirm that their research findings are faithful to participants' experiences" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 186). One suggestion from Lincoln and Guba (1985) was that to build trustworthiness or validity, researchers must focus on instruments and data collection techniques that have been previously implemented in qualitative research, which may include interviews, focus groups, documentation reviews, and observations. In addition, Shenton (2004) discussed triangulation as a form of credibility. Through triangulation, I built credibility by utilizing several forms of data collection to obtain information about a specific phenomenon.

Triangulation provided a form of validity and credibility for the research by utilizing different data sources to understand the results of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). For instance, researchers can achieve triangulation by using information from interviews, focus groups, documentation review, observations, and other forms of data collection to perform the analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). According to Patton (2002), triangulation captures different perspectives when interpreting one set of data. Moreover, the use of triangulation was ideal for this study because it will show different aspects of validity based on Patton (2002).

Ethical Procedures

Qualitative research can present some ethical concerns and problems between participants and the researcher when performing research, such as the rights and

protections of the participant (e.g., right to participate, protections from the study and work-related concerns; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) discussed the importance of participant protection throughout the research process. In this research project, I used Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards of ethics to protect participants. It was the responsibility of IRB members to provide oversight during a research project to protect the rights, dignity, and wellbeing of participants when engaged in a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For instance, members of the IRB ensured that the language of questions were appropriate, not biased, and does not pressure participants for answers (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In addition, the IRB ensured that participants were not marginalized and did not face discrimination during the study. Walden University's IRB approval number for this study is 0123-18-0299047 and it expires on January 22nd, 2019. For this qualitative research study, I utilized Walden's IRB and a dissertation supervisory committee to ensure the protection of all participants involved. I followed the recommendations of Saldana (2016) and utilized open-ended, non-biased interview questions, cues, and prompts, to ensure the protection of the participants and to build a positive, open relationship with the participants, as recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016). Due to the requirements of the IRB and the APA code of ethics for research, I informed participants of their rights to participate in the study and their right to leave the study at any time without any negative consequences, based on the recommendations of Rubin and Rubin (2012).

As the researcher for this study, I maintained awareness of the participants' behaviors when accepting sensitive information during their interviews to assess for

worry based on Patton (2002). I was aware of potential psychological stressors such as participants worrying about their privacy being compromised. To maintain privacy and protection of the participants' identities, I used numerical values as the participants' identifiers. In addition, I made sure that each participant fully understood the purpose of the study and that each participant signed the consent forms using their assigned numerical identifier.

Summary

Chapter 3 included a detailed discussion of why I selected a qualitative case study to answer the research questions. This chapter also included information about the researcher role and, because I understand what it is to be bullied in a high school setting and the failure of administrative staff to intervene, the topic and the research question have a personal and social meaning for me. The qualitative case study design was the ideal choice for this study to gain insight into and knowledge of professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. The chapter also included information about bias and ethics and how I as the researcher should deal with my personal bias while meeting ethical standards. Chapter four will contain the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight into and knowledge of what professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. Findings to-date suggest the potential for school staff to negatively impact the implementation of anti-bullying programs and the overall experiences of the student due to a lack of support (Andreou, Didaskalou, & Vlachou, 2008; Berlan et al., 2010; Huebner et al., 2013). For this research study, there was one central research question and two sub-questions. The research questions that will be addressed in this chapter are:

Central Research Question: What are the professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state?

Subquestion 1: What are the professional school staff's attitudes towards implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state?

Subquestion 2: How do professional school staff perceive their experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state?

This chapter includes a detailed discussion of the data collection, including the recruiting process, setting, demographics, data collection from face-to-face interviews and recording process, and the details regarding participants' observations and the review

of the school's bullying policies. The chapter also includes the analysis process that includes the creation of transcripts and the use of NVivo software to code the data, and the evidence of trustworthiness that includes the data credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Lastly, the chapter includes the results of the study relating to the research questions and ends with a summary.

Data Collection and Analysis Process

Setting

I commenced the data collection process within a rural high school in a northeastern state. The new school principal of the high school initiated the recruitment process. The principal assisted by contacting potential participants who met the criteria for participation. As for personal or organizational conditions, some of the participants who were recruited were affiliated with the current antibullying program Olweus. As the researcher, I was unaware of their affiliation the day of the interviews. One participant was the lead for the school's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). There were no other organizational or personal conditions that were made known to me during the recruitment and interview process.

Participant Selection and Demographics

One school in a rural town in a northeastern state agreed to participate in this study. Following the agreement from the superintendent and principal of the rural school, participants were recruited through an initial contact email from the principal with an explanation of the study that I provided. Following this email, individual school staff contacted me via my Walden email to express interest in participating in this study. There

were six females and three males ranging from 31 to 53 years of age. The participants' years of experience also varied, from 4 years to 29 years. There were two teachers, four administrators, and three identified as "other," which ranged from nursing staff to social workers and counselors. Each participant participated in a face-to-face interview followed by a review of their transcripts for accuracy and approval.

Data Collection Process

The first face-to-face interview started at 7:30am, and each school staff participant reviewed and signed the informed consent form with his or her prescribed numerical identifier, before the interview began. I then informed each participant that he or she could pull out of the study at any time and that his or her information, to include identity, would remain confidential. I activated the QuickTime Player on my MacBook Pro laptop to begin recording. I then reviewed the basic information about the purpose of the study and the interview protocol and began the interview. Each interview ranged from 15 to 30 minutes, and there was a total of nine participants. After each interview, I checked the recording for accuracy, saved the recording to a password protected external hard drive, and restarted the QuickTime Player program to prepare for the next interviewee.

During the interviews, I made basic observations of the staff participants' behaviors after hearing and responding to the interview questions. Once the interviews were concluded, I asked the Principal for additional information regarding the school's anti-bullying program. After the interviews, I sent a thank you email and the debriefing

document to each participant in the event they needed additional support due to stress related to their participation in this study.

Findings and Data Analysis

To begin the analysis process, I utilized the web application Trint to assist with transcribing the documents. Trint is an application that can effectively listen to audio recordings with natural speech while transcribing the recording into text. Once created, I sent each staff participant his or her interview transcription for review and approval. All staff participants approved and returned their transcripts within a two-week span. Once I received the approved transcripts, I downloaded them into NVivo, which is a computer software package for qualitative data analysis. I used NVivo to organize, categorize, and classify the transcribed data into codes based on common emergent themes. I placed observation data into the memo section and created codes from the common behavioral patterns that emerged. Lastly, I uploaded the bullying policy document provided by the principal and used it to create additional codes under main themes that emerged from the interviews.

To analyze the data, develop codes, and themes, I used Saldana (2016) five steps. I made several updates and changes with several revisions of the material for accuracy and to meet saturation.

Step 1: Organize and Prepare Data for Analysis

To code the data, I first created individual transcripts from each participant interview responses. I organized the transcripts verbatim, which decreased the potential for bias and made the document easy to understand. I then uploaded each transcript in the

NVivo software under "Files," making them easily accessible and coded using the "edit" option in the software. I labeled each transcript based on the interviewees' assigned numerical identifiers for organization and accuracy purposes. Once I uploaded each transcript correctly into NVivo, I was able to start the process of analyzing the information.

Step 2: Organized data on a sheet of paper in two different categories

As indicated above, placing the information on paper in two different categories is an antiquated process for data organization. Rather, I create "nodes" within the NVivo software that allowed for the organization of information. I kept the observation information, the bullying policy provided by the school's principal, and the interviewee transcripts separate. I started by reviewing the transcripts and used my interview document as a basis for organization. I used the interview questions as nodes to keep track of information. All the transcripts had a similar organization structured by the interview questions. There were minor variations to individual transcripts. By going through each transcript and aligning it with the interview questions, I was able to start looking for similarities and identified phrases.

Step 3: Look for Similarities and Identified Phrases

The similarities between the nine participants responses to the interview questions emerged quickly, as it pertained to the overall wellbeing of the LGBTQ student and a need for change within the school to help address bullying. There were only slight differences among the participants' responses. However, those slight differences did not

appear to change the outcome, which was a need for change in policy and antibullying procedures to help the LGBTQ student and staff supporters.

Interview Question 1: What are your personal attitudes and perceptions about homosexuality? And please elaborate. Participant 04 and 07 indicated that they believe homosexuality is a choice. Participant 04 explained that he/she believes that homosexuality is a choice, based on his/her religious faith. Participant 07 did not provide any explanation as to why he/she believed that homosexuality is a choice. However, both participants expressed their support for the LGBTQ students within their school. The other participants (01, 02, 03, 05, 06, 08, and 09) explained their acceptance for and understanding of the LGBTQ students. Participant 01 explained that his/her college experience provided him/her with more exposure and understanding of the LGBTQ population and he/she stated that the experience "kind of opened my eyes, I'm very open to all of that."

This question led to additional data, including some participants' perceptions of other school staff's negative attitudes toward LGBTQ students and how it impacted the student body. When asked the interview questions, participants 02, 03, 04, 08, and 09 shared their personal attitudes and perceptions about homosexuality and added that there are staff within the school system who display negative attitudes toward the LGBTQ students. Participant 03, for instance, discussed an ongoing issue with a staff member not using the correct pronoun and preferred name of a transgender student. Participant 03 explained that this teacher continued to use the excuse that he/she "forgot"; however, this staff have been informed several times of the pronoun and gender preferences of the

transgender student. In addition, the district's support was explored. Overall, participants 01, 02, 03, 05, 06, 07, and 08 explained that they feel their district is very supportive and "doing what they can" to support the LGBTQ students.

Interview Question 2: How do your attitudes and perceptions about homosexuality influence your relationships with LGBTQ students? All nine participants responded that they show support and willingness to assist LGBTQ students and they explained that their relationships with the LGBTQ students are not affected by their attitudes or perceptions. Participant 02 explained that his/her classroom is a safe space for anyone to visit and the students are aware of this option. Participants 03 and 08 explained that they show support and willingness to assist LGBTQ students, yet also noted that the LGBTQ students are affected by the group of school staff at the high school who are known to be negative toward their LGBTQ students. Participant 08, for instance, indicated that "certain teachers" make the LGBTQ students feel uncomfortable and, therefore, the LGBTQ students request not to be in their classrooms.

Interview Question 3: How do your attitudes and perceptions about homosexuality influence your implementation of school-based intervention strategies toward bullying of LGBTQ students? All nine participants responded that their attitudes and perceptions positively influence the implementation of school-based bullying intervention strategies and that they are open and willing to assist their LGBTQ students if or when they have a problem with bullying. However, participant 01 explained that he/she had limited direct exposure to LGBTQ bullying issues, due to his/her role in the school. Yet, all participants were open to helping an LGBTQ student in need.

Interview Question 4: How do you view the school's implementation of antibullying policies and the protection of LGBTQ students through the utilization of intervention programs at your school? All nine participants feel that there is a need for change within their current antibullying program. Participants 03, 05, 06 and 07 responded that having more support or involvement from teaching and administrative staff would be beneficial. Whereas, participant 01 responded that having more student involvement would be beneficial. Participants 05, 07, 08, and 09 responded that having more time to implement learning opportunities or education on topics would be beneficial. Finally, participants 01, 02, 03, 04 and 05 responded that having more training or support for special topics such as LGBTQ student issues would help develop an understanding of how to address issues related to LGBTQ students. Overall, it appeared that the participants were open to creating new programs to benefit the LGBTQ student population, since their current system is not as successful.

Interview Question 5: What would be helpful in your opinion to improve the implementation of intervention programs against bullying of LGBTQ students at your school? This interview question created many ideas for change. Participants 01, 03, and 05 responded that additional education, training, and seminars with professional speakers speaking about special issues, such as LGBTQ topics, was needed for success. Participants 03, 05, 06, 07, 08, and 09 responded that additional support from staff, students, and administration was needed. Participants 07, 08, and 09 responded that more time or a better structure for implementing an antibullying program would be helpful. Participants 02, 04, and 05 responded that having more exposure to specific areas, such

as the LGBTQ population, would help to make it more "commonplace." Overall, all nine participants indicated that something needed to change to help make their school's antibullying program better. However, the participants did not explain who should be responsible for initiating this change. Participant 06 did state that it is his/her goal to meet with other leaders, and the LGBTQ students, to see what the students' needs are to help start changing the current antibullying program in the school district.

Step 4: Coded by organizing and grouping; discover new themes

From these five interview questions, six categories (i.e., personal attitudes and perceptions toward LGBTQ students, perceptions of other staff and district staff attitudes of LGBTQ students, relationship effects due to attitudes and perceptions toward LGBTQ students, interventions implemented as a result of attitudes and perceptions of LGBTQ students, the current antibullying policy, and how to make change/what's needed for change) emerged from the nine-school staff participants' interview responses. From the categories, four main themes emerged (i.e., attitudes and perceptions of LGBTQ students, effects of perception of LGBTQ students, changes for antibullying programs and policies, and interviewer observations, which were based on the descriptive information or phrases utilized from the interviewees.

Attitudes and perceptions of LGBTQ students: This theme emerged from two categories I created from the participant responses. The categories were: personal attitudes and perceptions toward homosexuals and perceptions of other school staff and administrators. Participants 01, 02, 03, 05, 06, 08, and 09 discussed their support, acceptance, and understanding of their LGBTQ students. Participants 04 and 07 indicated

that they support their LGBTQ students; however, their personal belief is that homosexuality is a choice. Participant 04 indicated that due to his/her religious faith, he/she feels that homosexuality is a choice, yet his faith does not affect his/her feelings about LGBTQ students' rights to education or protection.

All nine participants indicated that the school staff support the LGBTQ students and the district staff are very engaged in helping their LGBTQ students. Participants 02, 03, 04, 08, and 09 expressed their concern, though, for a small group of teachers who are known to be unsupportive, negative, and cause concern for the LGBTQ students. Participant 03 expressed that she feels about 75 percent of the school staff are supportive. However, the other 25 percent have a negative impact on the student body. Overall, the participants described the school staff as trying to show support for their LGBTQ students.

Effects of attitudes and perceptions of LGBTQ students: This second theme emerged from the categories: relationship effects due to attitudes and perceptions and interventions implemented. I created these categories a result of the interview questions and participant responses. All nine participants responded that there were no negative relationship effects due their attitudes and perceptions of LGBTQ students. The use of interventions, building a relationship, and protecting the rights of the LGBTQ student were not affected by their perceptions and attitudes toward LGBTQ students; and, rather, all nine participants indicated that they would help an LGBTQ student if that student were experiencing any form of bullying. The relationships that were affected, based on the participant's perceptions, were the unsupportive school staff. Participants 03 and 08

discussed how LGBTQ students were affected by the negative school staff and how that impacted the students' willingness to work with those school staff.

From the coded transcript information, I created the category "interventions" implemented. Within this category, participants 01, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09 indicated areas of change that were needed to better implement interventions. Participant 07, for instance, indicated that being more mindful of biases and negative thoughts was discussed as important for implementing interventions. When discussing current interventions being used, participants 01, 02, 04, 05, 06, 07, 09 mentioned a few that are being, or have been, implemented within the high school. Participant 03 discussed the GSA (or Gay-Straight Alliance) group that helps LGBTQ students by offering support, building awareness, and discussing concerns. Participant 04 discussed the laws and policies that were put into place and participant 03 indicated that there were special protections that the school's lawyer taught the staff about the LGBTQ student population. Participant 05 indicated that he or she would go to the guidance counselor or social worker for additional assistance regarding LGBTQ student issues; and, finally, participant 01 indicated that she would bring at-risk behaviors or areas of concern to the administrators' attention. Otherwise, the participants did not have specific protocols they would follow to help address LGBTQ bullying.

Changes for antibullying programs and policy: This theme emerged from two categories. The first was antibullying policy that reviewed the current school districts antibullying policy and what the perceptions of the nine participants are for the current policy. In addition, this category integrated the bullying documentation provided by the

school to create triangulation and validity to the participants' responses. The ideas and perceptions of the nine participants regarding changes needed for a successful antibullying program for LGBTQ students was also part of this theme.

Participants 01, 02, 04, 05, 06, 07, and 09 indicated seeing potential for the current antibullying policy and program, and the participants indicated the school is doing what they can to help create a safe and supportive environment by using the Olweus antibullying program. Participants 01, 03, 04, 05, 06, 08, and 09 indicated some form of change is needed to help make the system more successful. Participants 01, 03, 05, 06, 07, 08, and 09 indicated that it would be helpful to have more direction and expectations of the students, have additional programs to address student issues, more specific staff training, and more exposure to different groups (such as the LGBTQ community). In addition, participant 07, 08, and 09 indicated that, to be successful, time set aside to work on these programs would be needed. Participant 05 stated that workshops from the guidance counselors or social workers may help get the children involved. Finally, participant 08 indicated that getting the students to have more control through peer-focused groups, tutoring, and mentoring opportunities, instead of relying on administration only, is needed.

The documentation review outlined staff training and the process for handling a bullying complaint. The policy states "training shall be provided to raise awareness of the problem of bullying within the schools and to facilitate staff identification of and response to such bullying behavior among students." Although the policy mentions that any discrimination against sexual orientation, gender, and sex will be addressed, there is

no specific information regarding the training, treatment, or procedure to help LGBTQ students who are dealing with bullying issues. The process for dealing with a bullying situation does not outline specific steps or protocols that are put into place. It discusses how administration will address each case individually to determine an outcome. There is no information for the staff regarding expectations or how to follow through with a bullying issue when it is occurring.

Interviewer observations: As a final theme, interviewer observations were added to triangulate and validate what the participants were saying. By using observation of behavior, I was able to get additional information from body language, tone, and inflection to understand potential feelings toward the interviews and conversation topics. As indicated, there were a total of nine participants, six females and three males. Their ages ranged from 31 years to 53 years old. Their years of experience also varied from four to 29 years. There were two teachers, four administrators, and three labeled as "other," ranging from nursing staff to social workers and counselors. The nine staff each participated in a face-to-face interview. There were three categories that I created within this theme: closed posture-tone-presentation, paused-hesitation, and open posture-tone-presentation.

Participants 02, 05, 06, and 09 presented with a closed posture tone or presentation during part of the interview. Participant 09 appeared closed during the initial part of the interview but opened throughout the interview process. Participants 02, 05, and 06 appeared slightly closed during most of the interview, facing away from me for most of the interview. Participants 01, 03, 04, 05, and 08 all hesitated or paused when

asked questions in the interview. Participants 01, 03, and 05 all hesitated with the first question relating to their personal perceptions of homosexuality; however, each participant was open to answering the questions. Participant 04 hesitated for most of the questions; however, it appeared the participant needed more time to process the question, often needing to read the question on paper. Finally, participant 08 appeared to hesitate throughout the interview, appearing more quiet and unsure how to answer. Finally, participants 01, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, and 09 displayed some form of open posture, tone or presentation during their interview. Participants 01, 03, 04, 07, and 08 were all open, engaged, and energetic about the conversation. Participants 05, 06, and 09 were the only participants who had moments that varied throughout the interview, where there were some indications of a close posture, tone, or presentation. Overall, the participants were engaged and appeared to want to engage in the topic under discussion.

Step 5: Review, Categorize, and Achieve Saturation

This step involved categorizing the inductive categories and the participants' responses by identifying similar concepts, developing specific codes to categorize responses, and identifying subcategories to assimilate information into new data findings until saturation. Once the initial codes and themes emerged, I reviewed everything several times to ensure I was connecting all the information presented by the interviewees with the research questions and interview questions. Throughout this process, new codes and themes emerged and developed further to represent the above-mentioned themes and codes. Once I was unable to make any additional corrections or contributions to the codes and themes, I knew data saturation was met.

Evidence of Data Quality

Credibility

One suggestion from Lincoln and Guba (1985) was that to build trustworthiness or validity, researchers must focus on instruments and data collection techniques that have been previously implemented in qualitative research, which may include interviews, focus groups, documentation reviews, and observations. In addition, Shenton (2004) discussed triangulation as a form of credibility. Through triangulation, I built credibility and dependability by utilizing several forms of data collection to obtain information about a specific phenomenon. The use of triangulation was ideal for this study because it showed different aspects of validity based on views of Patton (2002).

To build credibility and dependability, I first ensured that I did not include any biases in my interview questions during the interviews. During the interviews, I did not engage in additional conversation to avoid adding biases or leading questions. During the interviews, I used a voice-recording program, Quick-time Player on my MacBook Pro, to record the participant responses verbatim. From these recordings, I transcribed the participant responses verbatim, to decrease bias and increase accuracy of information and credibility of data. The school staff interviewed are viewed as experts in their field and with this area of research; therefore, using their verbatim responses increased the credibility of the data. In addition, I sent the transcribed interviews to the participants to review for accuracy and approval. For the interview observations, I focused only on non-verbal behavioral information to obtain impressions such as tone, posture, and non-verbal cues during conversation (such as eye contact, hand gestures, etc.). The document

included to build triangulation was directly from the school. The information was used to corroborate participant statements and to understand the school's current bullying policy. Limitations to the study will be discussed further in Chapter five.

Transferability

Billups (2014) discusses how transferability in qualitative research is not about generalizing the results, but the ability for other researchers to apply the same research design from the detail and information provided by the study. I utilized audio-recording technology to obtain verbatim what the participant and I said. In addition, I noted behavioral observations and additional questions that were asked outside of the initial interview questions. I used a nonprobability sample design with a purposeful sampling strategy because it allowed me to select school staff with sufficient experience to provide in-depth understanding and insight (Ravitch & Carl 2016). This study can be replicated at any rural high school with the same criteria for participation. The limitation for transferability in this study is related to what Billups (2016) called "thick description" (p. 3). Thick description is referred to as detailed notes, observations, prompts, and probes during field observations (Billups, 2014, p.3). In this study, transferable information is limited to the audio-recordings, behavioral observations, and transcripts.

Dependability

According to Billups (2014), dependability is the stable and consistent findings across different conditions over time. Billups (2014) discusses one way to address this area is through external audits. Throughout this process, I have collaborated with my dissertation committee comprised of two Walden professors; we discussed the

study's steps, procedures, and results to build-in external auditing as recommended by Billups (2014).

Confirmability

Billups (2014) discusses confirmability as related to the accuracy and truthfulness of the participants' perspective. This can be achieved through "reflexivity," which is the incorporation of the researcher's background and biases to help monitor the researcher's perspective and maintain validity; this is done to avoid superimposing the researcher's beliefs or perspectives onto the findings (Billups, 2014, p. 4). As discussed in chapter three, I outlined my biases and how I would continuously work with my committee to address any biases or preconceived ideas. To further eliminate bias, I used audio-recorded information and transcription services to ensure that the participant's exact words and phrases were reflected in the data. Finally, I reduced the number of follow-up questions and conversation during the interviews to avoid leading questions that could bias the results.

Results

I addressed each research question individually utilizing the corresponding interview questions. I reviewed the subquestions before the central research question in this section.

Sub-Question One

First subquestion: What are the professional school staff's attitudes towards implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state? The corresponding interview questions were:

What are your attitudes and perceptions toward LGBTQ students? Please explain your answer, and what are your attitudes and perceptions about school-based intervention strategies toward bullying of LGBTQ students? All nine participants discussed positive or accepting opinions regarding homosexuality and their LGBTQ students. Participant 02 and 07 explained that they feel homosexuality is a choice; however, these two participants expressed positive connections with the LGBTQ students and the need to provide them with the same rights and protections as others. For instance, participant number 04 stated verbatim:

> My personal belief has nothing to do with my job and how I feel. I think kids no matter who may, what they are or what they believe they are accepted who they are and what they believe here in school.

In relation to the second question as it pertains to specific LGBTQ intervention strategies, it did not appear there were specific interventions or programs that were set up. Participant 03 indicated that the Gay-Straight Alliance are trying to bring more awareness and understanding by bringing in speakers and presenters; however, based on the information provided, it does not seem there are specific antibullying programs or interventions to help the LGBTQ student. One positive outcome, though, is that participants agreed the goal is to help create an equal and safe environment for the LGBTQ students. Although participants 02, 03, 04, 08, and 09, discussed their concerns with the group of school staff who are negative toward LGBTQ students and perceived as not attempting to help their LGBTQ students, participant 03 mentioned that the new

administration staff are pro-LGBTQ and have made it a point to address their needs. Participant 03 stated:

> I'm not sure if you're aware we have new administration this year. The principal is new, and he is a huge advocate for our students, you know, when it comes to bullying. He has zero tolerance for anybody treating anybody else poorly and he wants to make sure the kids who are LGBTQ are especially supported so gets right to them.

All nine participants discussed the need, however, to create programs that support the school staff, students, and provide resources that are needed to address specific topics that arise within the LGBTQ student body or other student population.

Sub-Question Two

Second subquestion: How do professional school staff perceive their experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state? Corresponding questions were: How do you view the school's implementation of antibullying policies and the protection of LGBTQ students through the utilization of intervention programs at your school? And what would be helpful, in your opinion, to improve the implementation of intervention programs against bullying of LGBTQ students at your school? As indicated, the participant staff discussed areas that need improvement to make antibullying programs successful. Participants appeared mixed, though, on who should be more responsible for the antibullying program. Some of the participant staff felt that it was up to the

staff/administration to become more involved and make changes. For instance, participant number 05 stated:

> I think it's you know it's great to get the kids to get involved in education, but I think it's really important that administrators and teachers are involved. I feel like it has to be some sort of collaborative effort. And it can't just put it all on the kids.

On the other hand, some participants felt that the children needed to take more action and be more involved. For instance, participant number 08 stated:

> I think it's getting the students involved. I think it's kind of breaking it separating it from an administrative discipline like this has already happened and now we need to take action to being more proactive and having our students feel like we're a community in of itself here in the building room.

All nine participants discussed a way that they would change the current program to make it more successful. As indicated in the analysis section, participants 01, 03, 04, 05, 06, 08, and 09 explained there needs to be some form of change to help make the system more successful. Participants 01, 03, 05, 06, 07, 08, and 09 suggested it would be helpful to have more direction and expectations of the students, have additional programs to address the issues and support the students, more specific staff training, and more exposure to different groups (such as the LGBTQ community). Participant number 04 realized during his/her interview discussed that school staff are trained in the Olweus antibullying program and DASA (Dignity for All Students); however, he/she discussed that the school staff are not trained specifically in LGBTQ student issues or needs. Participant 04 stated the following verbatim:

> I think we have gone through training. We have had Dasa training. We've gone through Olweus training. But we have never individualized a group on how we are addressing that group. We have addressed this as a program this is how we deal with that. These are the areas, and this is what it looks like. Roleplayed it got through those things. And in the process of what we do. So, the teachers say you know we uses to, you know we even carry the rules strings that they could do and teachers had these to stop bullying (showed badge with tip card). You know the steps and the protocols but the part of the question you're asking is it, were they trained in specifically to address this group? No.

Based on the participant responses, the staff are indicating their need for additional knowledge and training, professionals in the field that could be a resource to the school staff, and more exposure to diverse groups. Based on participant 03, 05, 06, and 07 responses, school staff would like to see more staff and administrative support. Participants 01, 03, 04, 05, 06, 08, and 09, suggest the Olweus Antibullying Program, currently implemented in the school, has areas that need to be addressed. Some staff participants said they were expected to teach and talk about a topic that they, the staff, were not well informed about. Participant 05 explained that:

> I worry though I don't want to go back to our model of Olweus where the teachers are expected to teach kids about things they're not even comfortable or know enough about to teach. Not that they're comfortable or they're uncomfortable with the topic but they, from a personal level, don't know enough

> about it to teach kids about it. We need to be taught first or we need to learn from a professional.

In addition, participant 07, 08, and 09 indicated that time set aside to work on these programs would be needed to be successful. Based on these participant responses, the participant perceptions and attitudes do not influence the implementation of intervention strategies; however, the lack of education, support, and resources does influence the ability for school staff to successfully implement intervention strategies toward bullying of LGBTQ students.

Central Research Question

The central research question was: What are the professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state? The central research question corresponded with the following interview question. What are your experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students? The nine school staff participants provided a mix of responses related to the implementation of antibullying intervention strategies. One such intervention is the school's policy to follow current NY state law regarding the protections of LGBTQ students and the school's no-tolerance policy for bullying. For instance, participant number 04 stated:

> You know school there are lots of rules and regulations and laws that are there to protect our students and the schools is an open place where everyone needs to feel safe. And policies are driven based upon that as well as for intervention.

Regarding interventions that are used within the school, the participants discussed going to administrative staff if there was an issue with bullying or they attempted to help the student themselves. Overall, the nine participants did not indicate specific intervention strategies that were utilized within the school to address or reduce bullying.

Based on the participant responses, most of the school staff are perceived as being open and accepting of their LGBTQ students. Yet, there are still some school staff within the school district who are perceived to be unsupportive and disrespectful toward their LGBTQ students. Based on responses from participants 02, 03, 04, 08, and 09, the perceived unsupportive staff were viewed as less likely to help a student who is experiencing discrimination based on their sexuality or gender identity; participant 03 also said these perceived unsupportive staff would also disregard the transgendered child's preferred name or pronoun. All nine participants explained they felt that the school district staff try to adhere to the laws and rights of their LGBTQ students. The school district staff have a trained and educated law staff dedicated to training and educating school staff on upholding the students' legal rights. The staff participants agreed that the administrative staff are supportive, accepting, and try to help the LGBTQ students within the district.

The participants' concern is with the unclear, non-directive antibullying program that currently exists. Based on interview responses, it appears the school's administrative staff have tried to implement several types of educational sessions (e.g., morning workshops), opportunities for students to discuss their concerns (e.g., hotlines and anonymous boxes), and has continued to grow their Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). The

staff participants' concerns are due to a lack of education on the special topics and guidance for how to specifically handle LGBTQ discrimination. Participant number 05 stated, "The education on special topics needs to be a collaborative effort." Students, staff, administration, and even the community should be involved in developing standards. By building additional supports and resources within the school, these resources can help assist the school staff when a bullying issue arises with an LGBTQ student. In addition, specific interventions for dealing with bullying incidents would help each staff person know how to handle a situation and help each child understand the school's behavioral expectations. I will address additional recommendations in Chapter five. Overall, there appeared to be a mix of experience with interventions, and the participants all indicated their willingness and support for helping their LGBTQ students.

Summary and Transition

Chapter 4 included the findings from the qualitative interviews, review of the antibullying policy documentation, and interviewer observation data. There were several categories and themes that emerged from the interview responses. Participants indicated their support and acceptance of their LGBTQ students, believing, or not, that homosexuality is a choice. Several school staff responded to interview questions about their attitudes and perceptions of the LGBTQ students and further elaborated about other school staff who are not supportive. As a result, participants indicated that students are negatively affected by these school staff and may try to avoid them. There was a mix of responses for how to change and manage the school's antibullying programs and policy. One thing that all the participants agreed on was that the school's antibullying policy and

programs need to be changed. The school staff participants agreed that the changes need to involve a collaboration with additional professionals who can provide education about and exposure to the LGBTQ student. It did not appear that the staff participants allowed their personal opinions to affect their professional expectations or how they implement interventions. The school staff participants all agreed that they feel their school is trying to make a difference for their LGBTQ students and that most of the school staff are supportive. Overall, the school staff appeared willing to make changes but need more direction on how to start and help the LGBTQ group. Chapter five will include an interpretation of the findings, the limitations of study, and recommendations for this current school, implications for positive social change, and recommendations for future studies before concluding with a summary.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Overview

Professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students have not been well documented. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight into and knowledge of professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. Findings from a survey conducted by Koswic et al. (2012) showed that 63.5% of the LGBTQ students feel unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation and 56.9% of the students felt unable to reach out to their school staff after hearing homophobic remarks from teachers and other school staff. Additionally, 60.4% of LGBTQ students did not report bullying incidents to school staff because they believed their school staff would not be helpful or believed the situation could worsen (Koswic et al., 2012). Additionally, 36.7% of the students who informed school staff about bullying incidents, noted the staff did not assist them (Koswic et al., 2012).

The nine school staff participants shared their experiences as a meaningful declaration for this case study. The nine participants had similar responses to questions about their experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. The interview question responses regarding the treatment and safety of the LGBTQ students were similar, in that the participants agreed that the LGBTQ students deserved to be protected and safe during school. The participants felt their attitudes and perceptions influenced the

implementation of intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a positive way and impacted their motivation to help their LGBTQ students, and other students, with bullying issues.

Interpretation of Findings

The four themes that emerged after coding the data included a detailed account of the nine professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students. I used this study to address the questions about how the participants' personal attitudes and perceptions affected the LGBTQ students. The participants explained how their attitudes and perception of LGBTQ students influenced antibullying programs and policies. The school staff indicated that they, and most of the other school staff, are open and willing to assist their LGBTQ students if or when they have a problem with bullying.

Attitudes and Perceptions

Staff attitudes and perceptions of their LGBTQ students. When addressing the research questions, I explored additional information regarding the attitudes and perceptions of the school staff as it related to LGBTQ students and implementing intervention strategies to assist LGBTQ students who are being bullied. All participants felt that LGBTQ students have the right to a safe and supportive educational environment. Participants 01, 02, 03, 05, 06, 08, and 09 have positive attitudes and perceptions toward homosexuals and will support LGBTQ students. Although participants 04 and 07 believe that homosexuality is a choice, they did not express negative attitudes about the LGBTQ students during this discussion. All the participants

were willing to engage in protecting and providing a safe environment to the LGBTQ students when a bullying issue emerges. Overall, the participants believe that the school staff tries to utilize inclusion, support, and education to assist and support the LGBTQ students. However, some of the participants sensed that a small group of school staff displayed negative attitudes and perceptions toward the LGBTQ student population. However, school staff administrators made it clear to me that those behaviors are not tolerated and that the administrative staff addresses them as they arise. Like findings from O'Connell et al. (2010), this study found the school staff wanted to support the LGBTQ students; they also identified limitations and needed staff support to be able to effectively address the LGBTQ students' needs.

Experiences with interventions. All nine participants acknowledged that their attitudes and perceptions positively influence the implementation of school-based bullying intervention strategies, because they are open and willing to assist their LGBTQ students if or when they have a problem with bullying. Although there were no limitations regarding the school staff's perceptions and attitudes influencing interventions, the school staff noted that limited education, exposure to LGBTQ student needs, and support or services regarding these topics were a struggle when trying to implement effective intervention strategies. The topic of changing antibullying policy and programs developed throughout the interviews and will be discussed below.

Effects of Perception

To better understand the lived experiences of the staff, questions regarding how they viewed the impact of their attitudes and perceptions on LGBTQ students and their

ability to implement intervention strategies were discussed. All nine participants were supportive and willing to assist LGBTQ students, and their relationships with the LGBTQ students were not affected by their attitudes or perceptions. Participant 02 stated the classroom is a safe space for anyone to visit and the students are aware of the option to receive visitors. Participants 03 and 08 show support and willingness to assist LGBTQ students yet think that the LGBTQ students are negatively affected by school staff who are known to be negative toward their LGBTQ students. Participants 01, 02, 03, 04 08, and 09 believe that the school district staff are very engaged in helping their LGBTQ students. The school staff participants' attitudes and perceptions did not have any negative effects on implementing bullying interventions, building positive relationships, and protecting the rights of LGBTQ students.

According to the participants, the negatively impacted relationships were between the unsupportive school staff and the LGBTQ students. Participants 03 and 08 discussed how LGBTQ students were affected by the negative school staff and how that impacted the students' willingness to work with those school staff. The teaching staff in the O'Connell et al. (2010) study displayed negative attitudes toward LGBTQ students, reporting that a lack of education regarding LGBTQ students influenced their perceptions.

Changes for Antibullying Programs and Policies

When the staff participants answered the research questions, they had mixed responses regarding their experiences related to implementation of intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students. Although the participants feel that their

school administrators and staff are doing all they can to help protect the LGBTQ students, there was limited information regarding specific bullying intervention strategies or assistance that the school staff provide to the LGBTQ students. Most of the participants also indicated that additional resources, education, and support are needed to build a successful antibullying program. All nine participants would like to change the current program to make it more successful, which would also increase their level of self and collective efficacy in implementing intervention strategies to support LGBTQ students. Participants 01, 03, 05, 06, 07, 08, and 09 suggested it would be helpful to have more direction and expectations for the students, additional programs to address the issues and support the students, more specific staff training, and more exposure to different groups (such as the LGBTQ community). According to Angelle and Teague (2014), staff perceptions about how they perform and how they can meet their individual and collective goals impact their overall efficacy beliefs (Angelle & Teague, 2014).

In addition, belief in the group's performance, support from other staff or administration to complete tasks, and the ability to reach common goals are indicative of the groups' collective efficacy (Angelle & Teague, 2014). The staff is not very effective at this point in implementing intervention strategies, yet they feel their school is capable but has not found common goals or delegated tasks to meet those goals, thereby causing some uncertainty among the staff. In addition, the lack of clear goals and intervention strategies could be causing staff to be unclear about who implements intervention strategies and who can provide support for the LGBTQ student during bullying situations. The school staff feel they need to collaborate with each other more to build

stronger connections with the students. Participants 03, 05, 06, 07, 08, and 09 believed that having more staff support, more connection, and more knowledge will help the staff be successful. The staff explained that what is needed are the support of the school administrators, additional staff support, education, exposure, connection, and clear guidelines for bullying intervention strategies to initiate a positive, proactive antibullying program, outlining what staff should do and expect from each other and the antibullying program.

Interviewer Observations

As a final theme, I added interviewer observations to triangulate and validate what the participants were reporting. By observing participant behavior, I was able to get additional information from body language, tone, and inflection to understand participants' possible feelings toward the interview questions and topic. Overall, based on the observations, the participants were open and could answer the interview questions freely. Some participants struggled at the beginning of the interviews; however, they responded more freely as time went on. For instance, participants 02, 05, 06, and 09 presented themselves with a closed posture (i.e., arms crossed and sitting overly erect) during part of the interview. Participants 02, 05, and 06 appeared slightly closed, as they sat facing away from me for most of the interview. Participants 01, 03, 04, 05, and 08 all hesitated or paused before responding to interview questions. Participants 01, 03, and 05 all hesitated before responding to the first question about their personal perceptions of homosexuality. Participant 04 appeared to need more time to process the question and often needed to read the questions on paper, hesitating for most of the questions. Finally,

participant 08 hesitated throughout the interview, was quiet, and seemed unsure about how to respond to the questions. Aside from these behavioral observations, the participants showed open posture and tone and were engaged and energetic during the conversation. This observation information corroborated the participants' responses and assisted in validating the data.

Theoretical Considerations

The interpretations of findings for the participant's experiences with implementing intervention strategies aligns with Bandura's (1997/2005) views of collective efficacy, which is an area of social cognitive learning theory that involves group motivation and the likelihood of engaging in certain choices and behaviors. The school staff's perceptions of how they can perform individually, as well as the goals they can reach collectively, are indicators of their efficacy beliefs (Angelle & Teague, 2014). Belief in the group's performance, support from other staff or administration to complete tasks, and the ability to reach common goals are indicative of the group's collective efficacy (Angelle & Teague, 2014). It may be possible that due to the group's collective efficacy, educators and school staff may justify their lack of understanding and/or willingness to support the LGBTQ students based on the accepted norm within the rural school system. School staff participants' responses to the interview questions did not indicate lack of support for LGBTQ students. However, several participants indicated that their background/education, history, and family influenced their lack of understanding, which contribute to the group's collective efficacy and shared behaviors (Bandura, 1997; 2005).

An area that this study has contributed to is understanding how social groups impact someone's perceptions, understanding, or beliefs about other groups of people. The staff participants indicated that they follow social expectations from the school, based on policy and laws. However, the participants indicated that an area of their social group or experience has influenced their knowledge and understanding of the LGBTQ population presently. For instance, some participants indicated that their family or school friends influenced their level of knowledge or exposure with LGBTQ individuals. Others indicated that their religious views impacted their views. This is helpful information for future antibullying program developers, to associate social expectations with understanding of LGBTQ student needs/issues, to help ameliorate issues with bullying and lack of support from staff, which lends to collective efficacy and school connectedness.

The teaching staff's perceptions of how they can perform and the goals they can reach are indicators of their efficacy beliefs, as well (Angelle & Teague, 2014). Belief in the groups' performance, support from other staff or administration to complete tasks, and ability to reach common goals are indicative of the groups' collective efficacy (Angelle & Teague, 2014). Although this area was not specifically addressed in the interviews, the participants indicated areas that correlate to the need for collective efficacy and how their school operates. Participant 05, for instance, stated:

> I think maybe the social worker, the counselors some but from an administrator you know when the administrator speaks it's a big deal. Whether they're talking

about special ed. students, or ya know... it's like people are quite and listen when an administrator speaks.

The participant interviews indicated that more staff support, more connection, and more knowledge is what is needed to help the staff be successful. Based on the information, it appears that the staff are in agreement with wanting to meet the needs of the students, but the participants did not indicate if they have collaborated on how to make these changes occur and what changes to make to be successful. Therefore, in relation to the proposed study, it is possible that due to the group's collective efficacy and social influences, educators and school staff may justify their lack of understanding and/or willingness to support the LGBTQ students with bullying experiences and when reporting bullying, based on the social norm within the rural school system.

Limitations

The qualitative nature of this case study suffers from certain limitations because the small sample size may limit the variety of responses. To resolve this limitation, I obtained a sufficient sample size of approximately 5 to 10 participants, as recommended by Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2002) for qualitative sampling. This study included a total of nine participants from one rural high school in NY State. Another limitation of this study was trustworthiness. To address the limitations of trustworthiness, I review the four areas: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

As discussed in Chapter four, I used triangulation to build credibility and dependability by utilizing several forms of data collection to obtain information about the

phenomenon. The use of triangulation was ideal for this study because it allowed me to establish different aspects of validity, based on views of Patton (2002). To build triangulation, I utilized interview responses from the nine participants, recorded their observed behaviors, and reviewed documentation about the school's antibullying policies and procedures. Furthermore, within these forms of data collection, there were limitations. Utilizing school staff interviewees from one school district limited the perspective of what was happening within the broader network of schools as it related to LGBTQ student issues. For future studies, researchers may want to consider including professional school staff from several school districts. I utilized specific criteria to recruit the participants. Although specifying the participants based on title and experience does limit the participant pool, I consider these individuals the "professionals" or "experts" in their fields. Moreover, using the experts' verbatim perceptions and responses within a case study helps build reliability by eliminating researcher subjectivity and bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Interviewer observations were also analyzed. Although this is a commonly used form of data collection for a case study, it can be biased based on the researcher's perceptions of what the participants were reporting and how the participants were behaving. I used the observed behavior (e.g., pauses, hesitations, voice tones, and body postures) to corroborate (i.e., their behaviors were consistent with their verbal comments) participants' interview responses.

The last step at achieving triangulation was the review of documentation detailing the school's antibullying policy and procedures. The school's policy on bullying provided

information about how the school administrators expect the participants to operate; the school's antibullying policy was also useful for corroborating information the staff were reporting in their interviews. Unfortunately, the school's bullying policy document had limited information about LGBTQ student needs, how to implement interventions, and what interventions are being used to prevent or intervene during bullying situations. Additional documentation or information regarding their Olweus program, the antibullying program that is currently in-place, and the techniques for implementing teacher training or intervention strategies would have been more helpful.

Transferability

Billups (2014) discusses how transferability in qualitative research is not about generalizing the results but the ability for other researchers to apply the same research design from the detail and information provided. To build transferability, I utilized audio-recording technology to obtain verbatim what the participant and I said. As discussed, I noted behavioral observations, but with behavioral observations there are limitations regarding possible biases (as discussed above). To mitigate that problem, I relied on my audio-recordings to help reduce biases and interpret the behavioral information correctly. I used a nonprobability sample design with a purposeful sampling strategy because it allowed me to select school staff with sufficient experience to provide in-depth understanding and insight (Ravitch & Carl 2016).

Within the recruiting process, there were some limitations due to the requirements from the community partner (the rural school entity). Upon agreement, the principal chose the candidates that met the criteria I provided. Although they met the basic criteria

for inclusion (see Appendix B), specific sampling and small population size may restrict the transferability of these findings. In addition, the sample consisted of mostly administrative staff. Although this population is beneficial in providing information, the administrative staff are not the front staff who are dealing with the bullying experiences of the LGBTQ firsthand. In addition, the population represented is limited to one school that was chosen to participate. The participants were chosen from a rural a northeastern state high school. Results may vary due to geographic locations, which should be taken into consideration. The limitation for transferability is related to what Billups (2016) called "thick description" (p. 3), i.e., detailed notes, observations, prompts, and probes during field observations (Billups, 2014, p.3). My study was limited to transferable audio-recordings, behavioral observations, and transcripts.

Dependability

As discussed in chapter four, I utilized my dissertation committee members to assist with auditing my work and ensuring that I was following procedures for a qualitative case study. The limitation in this area was the access to my committee members. Throughout this dissertation process, I had several changes in committee members. This caused disruptions in the research process; however, my current committee has been very active and has reviewed all my work. I have constant contact with my dissertation chair to ensure that I am meeting requirements and my methodologist is available, as needed, for consultation and review of my work.

Confirmability

I reduced the potential for researcher bias by including detailed information about my background and biases to help monitor my perspective throughout the analysis of the data. I also transcribed the participants' voice-recorded interview responses verbatim, allowing for accuracy and reliability. Although there are limitations in a case study design, this case study provided additional in-depth information about (a) the rural, professional school staff's experiences implementing intervention strategies to support LGBTQ students who are being bullied and (b) what is helping or preventing the school staff from successfully implementing intervention strategies or programs.

Recommendations for Further Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain more insight into and knowledge about the experiences of professional school staff's implementation of antibullying interventions for LGBTQ students. As discussed, there were limitations due to the nature of the study and the requirements from the community partner. This study was limited to the perspectives of nine rural professional school staff who provided a wide range of valuable information. However, future researchers may want to consider a more diverse population. By including participants from other school districts, future researchers can expand the body of knowledge pertaining to school staff's attitudes and perceptions toward their LGBTQ students and the impact their attitudes and perceptions have on how antibullying interventions are implemented. In addition, exploring other antibullying programs and procedures (e.g., how other schools implement the Olweus antibullying system) may be helpful for future researchers to gain a better understanding of what is needed to help support LGBTQ students. For instance, it was discussed during

the interviews that the middle school has a very successful outline for implementing the Olweus program and integrating LGBTQ student needs. This may be an additional area to explore. In addition, future researchers should focus on (a) specific needs of LGBTQ students, (b) educational and training options for staff, and (c) specific intervention strategies to help LGBTQ students.

Implications

Positive Social Change

Implications for positive social changes and recommendations derive from the study's findings. These recommendations came from the specific needs and concerns expressed by the participants' responses to the interview questions. The nine school staff participants noted that the administrative and teaching staff are working on building their antibullying program and that a detailed set of expectations and potential outcomes for staff and students would be beneficial. The school staff participants discussed that collaboration between administrative and non-administrative school staff to revise and implement antibullying policies and procedures would be helpful in building a successful program. This recommendation, when implemented, would have implications for positive social change. For instance, the school could consider a comprehensive antibullying policy designed to discourage bullying of any kind (from student-to-student, student-to-staff, and staff-to-student) and procedures to provide direction and guidance about how staff and students should tackle all forms of bullying in the school.

Staff collaboration could potentially lead to greater staff connectedness and efficacy school-wide. Building district-wide staff connections and educational resources

could help build and maintain staff performance and increase the utilization of policies and programs. When students see that the school staff are on-board with antibullying policy, the students will become more active in complying with antibullying policies (Alexander et al., 2011; Calik et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2013). Smith et al. (2013) found that students reported an increased sense of belonging when they observed teaching staff engaging in antibullying interventions. Smith et al. further reported an increase in students' overall sense of collective efficacy and positive behaviors in the school setting (i.e. engaging in antibullying steps and improved academics). Students also reported feeling empowered, safe, and supported when school staff engaged in intervention strategies to address bullying behavior, which increased the overall wellbeing of the LGBTQ students within those schools (Alexander et al., 2011; Calik et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2013). Moreover, researchers have indicated that administrative support helps to motivate the teaching staff to continue following through with antibullying programs and policies implemented by their school districts (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Barchia & Bussey, 2011; Calik et al., 2012; Skinner, Babinski, & Gifford, 2014; Smith et al., 2013; Veenstra et al., 2014).

To foster positive social change, I used the findings and recommendations from the participants' interview responses to suggest creating specific resources and guidelines for how to assist protected groups (e.g., race religion, national origin, gender, sex, sexual orientation, and disability) within the school district. Providing additional educational information and supportive resources for the protected groups (already listed in the bullying policy of the school) would allow school administrators and staff to develop

group-specific specialized training sessions for staff to better assist them during crisis situations. Additionally, further training for faculty and administrative staff would assist the school staff with providing guidance and protection for protected groups (as listed in the bullying policy of the school). This would increase their confidence and competence when working with their LGBTQ students and other students in need; this is an example of collective efficacy building. In addition, professional school staff, such as guidance counselors and social workers with experience working with LGBTQ populations, can help the teaching staff learn best practices in managing bullying situations.

Conclusion

The objective of this qualitative case study was to explore professional school staff's experiences with implementing intervention strategies designed to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students in a rural high school in a northeastern state. For this study, I utilized voice-only, audio-recorded, face-to-face interviews with nine professional school staff from a rural high school in a northeastern state. The results of this study indicated that, although there is limited education and exposure to the LGBTQ population in this rural setting, all nine school staff participants were supportive and willing to help their LGBTQ students. The school's no-tolerance for bullying policy motivates staff to connect and collaborate, which are two key components in building collective efficacy and increasing the success of antibullying interventions.

This study's findings indicated there are barriers, foremost among them are the small, non-supportive groups of staff who negatively impact a rural high school's student body and other school staff. Moreover, additional education, training, school-wide

support, and guidelines for implementing effective antibullying interventions are needed. This is an exciting time for educational programs to build staff and community supports, trainings, and programs to help facilitate all students' success. Given widespread prejudice and discrimination, this is an opportunity to help LGBTQ students feel supported and encouraged so they can continue with their education, build self-acceptance, and improve their overall wellbeing.

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