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Cultural Diversity in Education: Examining the Challenges and Issues of LGBTQ Students Enrolled in a Tertiary Education Institution in The Bahamas

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Cultural Diversity in Education: Examining the Challenges and Issues of LGBTQ Students Enrolled in a Tertiary Education Institution in The Bahamas

by
Terry Rolle

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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Terry Rolle under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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January 10, 2023
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Abstract

Cultural Diversity in Education: Examining the Challenges and Issues of LGBTQ Students Enrolled in a Tertiary Education Institution in The Bahamas. Terry Rolle, 2023: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Key words: LGBTQ people, phenomenology, sexuality, gender discrimination

This research study examined the challenges and issues faced by LGBTQ students attending a tertiary education institution in The Bahamas. Utilizing a phenomenological analytical process, seven individuals gave information regarding their lived experiences in a tertiary institution in The Bahamas. Data for this research study were collected through two 60-minute in depth interview sessions. This qualitative study was guided by the theoretical frameworks of the planned approach to change and the theory of resilience, both of which were used to inform the elements of the research. Many research studies have been conducted in regard to the experiences faced by LGBTQ students while in an academic setting, and the findings of this research were consistent with the literature. The students face abuse and discrimination in a very consistent manner, and this has led to physical and mental health challenges.

This qualitative study used three research questions to procure the answers related to the LGBTQ participants' lived experiences at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas. To date, there have never been any research studies such as this conducted at the institution. After transcribing the data, the researcher was able to isolate five themes: (a) LGBTQ student awareness and visibility, (b) need for more supportive faculty and staff, (c) improving the campus climate and safety, (d) LGBTQ student resources and support, and (e) learning to cope with the challenges.

The results of this research study can be useful to bring about academic community awareness that will expose the plight of the LGBTQ students while they are enrolled in academic settings in The Bahamas. Moreover, it can be used to help tertiary education institutions create policies and laws that will respect and honor the rights of LGBTQ students while they are in the academic setting.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Transitioning through a tertiary education environment can be a problematic and trying task for many students (Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Conversely, student diversity in tertiary education has improved the teaching and learning environment (Civitillo et al., 2018) For instance, Chin and Trimble (2015) contended that diversity involvement would create awareness so that students learn how to interact with each other in a more respectful and caring manner. Thus, an academic environment is said to be one that should promote student interactions, cohesiveness, and team building.

Contrary to the above statements, many researchers have documented that a peaceful academic environment is not the case for all students (Renn, 2010). This is specifically true for those college students who face concerns like discriminations, including mistreatment, which can cause anxiety and other phobias (Alkandari, 2020). The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) student, for example, due to sexual identity, represents one such grouping that has encountered many challenges and issues, especially in the academic setting (Carter, 2013; Hong et al., 2016; Partridge et al., 2014).

There are numerous recorded predicaments of marginalization, isolation, and discrimination that LGBTQ students encounter while enrolled in an academic institution (Partridge et al., 2014; Tetreault et al., 2013). In fact, the students are verbally, mentally, and physically abused more frequently than heterosexual students (Higa et al., 2014; Renn, 2010). According to a very recent school survey, conducted by Kosciw et al. (2020) on LGBTQ students ($N = 16, 713$), an estimated 81.6% admitted to experiencing assaults, threats, actual and perceived insults, and put downs. Similarly, after an assessment of LGBTQ students ($N = 141$), data from eight engineering education

universities revealed accounts of belittling, bullying, being disregarded, and overall acts of inequality from teachers and classmates (Cech & Rothwell, 2018).

Notwithstanding the growth and advancement that have facilitated a more favorable attitude towards LGBTQ students, there are still concerns about their coming out and admitting that they are an LGBTQ individual in an academic setting and, more so, the higher educational settings (Ozaki et al., 2016; Rankin et al., 2010). Actually, coming out and embracing the LGBTQ status is another major problem for the students. Many LGBTQ students have disclosed the antagonistic and belligerent trials they had to endure when they revealed their true gender identity (Ozaki et al., 2016).

Statement of the Problem

A review of the literature illustrated that LGBTQ students, despite the increase in their numbers and affiliation disclosures, are labeled as minority people and are subjected to stigma and discrimination (Renn, 2010). Therefore, the intent of this study was to ascertain, expose, and understand the challenges, issues, and discriminatory practices LGBTQ students face when enrolled in a tertiary education institution in The Bahamas, as little is known about this matter. Moreover, to the knowledge of the researcher, this topic has never been studied before at the institution.

Beemycin and Rankin (2011) remarked that many students at tertiary-level institutions would rather remain covert than align themselves as being a member of the LGBTQ population due to discrimination, victimization, and rejection fears. Renn (2010) also underscored those investigations of LGBTQ students in tertiary institutions, as they have followed a distinct route that was usually infused with identity, social, and behavioral challenges. Nevertheless, the challenges that these students face have to be showcased in order to raise awareness so that unpleasant outcomes can be prevented and

eliminated. Rhoades et al. (2013) also acknowledged that more progress is needed in the way LGBTQ students are treated in academia and that there are still many more obstacles to be overcome.

Researchers such as Hamre and Pianta (2001) distinguished that students spend one quarter of their day in school and, therefore, should be in an environment that is free from stress and conducive to learning. Despite this revelation, it is a well-known fact that the school environment for LGBTQ students has always been an unsafe and antagonistic one (Holland et al., 2013; Russell et al., 2006). A lot of the abuse and victimization of LGBTQ students usually occurred in an academic setting (Renn, 2010). Despite these negative actions, the institutions have the obligation to create and maintain a campus environment that is safe and can assist the students with achieving their academic goals (Davis, 2017).

Background and Justification of the Problem

Notably, the acronym LGBTQ is an abbreviation that denotes a description of an individual's gender identity or sexual persuasion (Wagaman, 2016). Many students at tertiary institutions in The Bahamas are reluctant to come out and admit to being an LGBTQ individual because they fear discrimination and retaliation. According to the databases of many tertiary institutions, every year, the student population increases, and more diverse students who have different needs are registered (Hanson et al., 2019; Terenzini et al., 1994; Woodford et al., 2018). Additionally, LGBTQ students have problems with social relationships and interpersonal communication, and they develop an inherent need for support and reassurance.

Historic records relate many troublesome events that LGBTQ students encountered while in an academic institution setting. One of these is the 1960s hardship

of Robert Martin, alias Stephen Donaldson, an LGBTQ individual who, as part of his admissions agreement to the University of Columbia, had to consent to attend regular psychotherapy sessions and was warned not to become romantically involved with other male students (Retherford, 2016). Another remarkable incident includes the unforgettable story of the late Lawrence King, when, in 2008, the then 15-year-old made Valentine's Day advances toward a fellow classmate (Reis, 2009). As a result of the proposition, the incensed student shot and murdered King on the school campus.

It is apparent that there are real problems related to the health and well-being of LGBTQ individuals. Data have further emphasized the repeated incidents of bullying, verbal, and physical abuse, hate crimes, vitriol throwing, exclusion, and rivalry against LGBTQ students in academic settings (Liboro et al., 2018; Russell et al., 2006). Higa et al. (2014) also agreed that many of the negative actions towards LGBTQ students usually happened at school and that surprisingly some LGBTQ students even participated in discriminatory actions against their own LGBTQ contemporaries.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

Past research studies do not provide a clear picture of the roles of faculty, school administrators, and other staff members in supporting their LGBTQ students at tertiary-level institutions (Liboro et al., 2018; Renn, 2010; Rhoades et al., 2013). The vagary of the behavior pattern of affiliates in academia must be addressed to promote and establish long-term acceptance and recognition of LGBTQ students. Also, literature has revealed that most of the research studies are quantitative, as there are very few qualitative studies on this subject or on LGBTQ students at tertiary institutions (Higa et al., 2014).

There is also a need for more research to determine the academic outcomes, and particularly achievements, of LGBTQ students due to the challenges and issues that they

encounter while in learning institutions. To date, there are also not many studies on LGBTQ students in tertiary education programs when compared to middle and high schools (Baams et al., 2017; Colvin et al., 2019; Higa et al., 2014). Notably, most LGBTQ research studies have spoken about the discrimination and harassment to which these students are subjected, but there is a limited number of studies addressing the area of academic success or failure in these students (Pizmony-Levy & Kosciw, 2016).

The final gap in the evidence is that there are not many research studies on the experiences of LGBTQ students while they are presently in tertiary education, as a large majority of the studies examined students retrospectively (Hall & Rodgers, 2019). This study examined all areas that were perceived as challenges for the LGBTQ population (e.g., academic achievement and outcomes, peer and teacher relationships, school experiences, and lastly LGBTQ students' own personal attitudes towards the tertiary teaching learning institution). This study used a qualitative approach to answer and complete the study questions.

Audience

This study was designed to inform the LGBTQ students, administrators, staff, faculty members, and heterosexual students who were enrolled at the tertiary education institution in The Bahamas. By revealing the challenges and issues LGBTQ students encountered at the tertiary level, it was hoped that the findings would cause the institution to create policies, institute support services, and provide resources for LGBTQ students. Next, the results of this study will also benefit other higher education institutions in The Bahamas by providing them with a clear guide as to the changes, additions, and establishment of policies that are founded to support and promote a cohesive and engaging school environment for all students, particularly LGBTQ students.

Setting of the Study

The setting of this study was a tertiary academic institution located in The Bahamas. For this research study, it will be known primarily as a Bahamian tertiary institution. It is a public institution that has three campuses and was established by an act of the Bahamian government. The tertiary institution was first started as a 2-year institution, then a 4-year academic institution, and later moved from a college to a university. At the beginning of the spring semester in 2021, the institution had an enrollment of over 10,000 students. Additionally, the institution offers over 60 undergraduate programs and several postgraduate courses to date.

Researcher's Role

The researcher's role in this study was to identify LGBTQ students who were enrolled in a tertiary institution in The Bahamas and communicate with them to obtain the necessary information to answer the research questions. The communication took place in an interview format where participants were invited to a meeting. The researcher also identified the correct methodology in which to best carry out the research format. The information, once collected, was disseminated to other tertiary institutions in The Bahamas for LGBTQ students' management.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas. Additionally, this study was designed to expose the identified problems of these students to the relevant authorities so as to create awareness into the LGBTQ students' plight in order for the necessary support and policies to be established. Moreover, the researcher of this study hoped to eventually generate the support and interventions needed by students to manage and transition

through their academic journey. This study will also contribute to the body of literature to generate respect for all diverse groupings.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this applied dissertation, the following terms are defined.

Bisexual

This term refers to an individual who is romantically and sexually attracted to or involved with more than one sex (Flanders at al., 2017).

Challenges

This term refers to the obstacles that prevent the students from accessing a safe, respectful, and healthy school environment that is conducive to learning (Rhoades et al., 2013).

Coming Out

This term refers to the act of admitting to oneself and to other individuals regarding personal sexual orientation or gender identity. Individuals come out in different ways: mainly face to face and social media, which includes Facebook, text messaging, blogs, and emails (Orne, 2011).

Diversity

This term refers to having a different point of view or expressions (Chin & Trimble, 2015).

Gay

This term refers to men who are romantically and sexually involved with other men (Armstrong at al., 2020) or a man in a loving relationship with another man (Garvey et al., 2015).

Gender

This term refers to the identity of an individual based on genital anatomy (Nye et al., 2019).

Gender Identity

This term denotes the gender identity that the individual has assigned to themselves for example, either male, female, or queer (Hanson et al., 2019).

Heterosexual

This term refers to the romantic, sexual, emotional, and physical attraction and involvement of two people of the opposite sex or gender (Poole, 2017).

Issues

This term denotes any challenges or concerns that may be a problem for the individuals (Chin & Trimble, 2015).

Lesbian

This term refers to a female who is emotionally and sexually attracted to another woman or to an individual who identifies as being a female (Tate, 2012). It also refers to a woman in a loving relationship with another woman (Garvey et al., 2015).

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ)

This is an acronym that refers to individuals who identify and have taken actions to align themselves into a different sexual gender. It denotes people who are not straight and explains the diversity of sexual orientation and gender (Renn, 2010). This is the sample that was selected for the study. LGBTQ is also referred to as a sexual minority group (Hughes, 2018).

Lived Experiences

This is the personal knowledge of an individual about an event as they were

directly involved with it (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Queer/Questioning

This term refers to those individuals who have identified themselves as having a different gender from the known and accepted ones (Cooper & Brownell, 2017). Queer also denotes a sexual orientation that is not heterosexual, and the questioning individual is still unsure but is exploring their sexual orientation (Hanson et al., 2019).

Sexual Orientation

This term refers to the sex of the individual that the person is romantically, emotionally, and sexually attracted to or involved with, which can be both man and woman (Bailey et al., 2016; Risdon et al., 2000).

Student

This term refers to an individual who enrolls and attends an institution to complete a program of study (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

Support

This term refers to the physical and mental assistance given to an individual to help them resolve an adverse matter (Omolara & Adebukola, 2015).

Tertiary Institution

This term refers to an organization that offers occupational-level programs (Santiago et al., 2008). Examples include colleges, universities, and vocational, self-development education programs, as well as arts, science, finance, technology, business, and many other degree programs (Santiago et al., 2008). The institution has a set of prescribed programs that students have to complete before they are issued with a degree. In this study, a tertiary institution would be at the university level, which offers bachelor's degree and master's degree programs.

Transgender

This term refers to an individual who has a taken on a different gender from the one with which they were born (Monro, 2020). For this study, a transgender would be a person who believes and reconstructs their gender to be either a male or female and lives as they choose.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review looks at past and current research topics on LGBTQ students who were enrolled in academic settings to ascertain the issues and challenges they encounter. The literature review focuses on the problems, issues, and challenges that LGBTQ students encounter at tertiary institutions. This includes a cross-section of the published works that addressed the following: student perspective, coming out experiences, academic climate, adverse health concerns, and academic personnel. It was discovered that only a few of the research studies offered solutions to the LGBTQ problems. The theoretical framework that guided this research is presented and its relevance to the research explained.

Theoretical Framework

The problems associated with the challenges and issues that LGBTQ students encounter while attending a tertiary institution are grounded on (a) the planned approach to change (Shirey, 2013) and (b) the resilience theory (Garmzey et al., 1984).

The Planned Approach to Change

The planned approach to change is a three-stage theory that was originally developed by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s and used in the management field to demonstrate how change occurs despite initial resistance (Shirey, 2013). The theory was built on the premises of (a) unfreezing, which is the removal of the old ideas; (b) movement, which is a call for action; and (c) refreezing, which is acceptance of the change (Shirey, 2013). Change, according to Burnes (2004), is contemplated and involves purposeful activities to achieve an intended result. For instance, a new meaningful positive behavior and attitude would emerge, and this usually brings great satisfaction and contentment to the

student. Additionally, group behavior and dynamics are key components of the change process. The concept of this model looks at the forces for and against a planned change (Burnes, 2004; Marquis & Huston, 2015).

Unfreezing Stage. This is the first stage in the change process (Burnes, 2004). The problem is brought to the attention of others outlining that a change is greatly needed (Schein, 1996). At times, according to Papadopoulos (2011), people are reluctant or afraid to speak about wrongs and would rather conform to what is happening. Therefore, the issues must be presented in a logical and meticulous manner that would inform organizations why a change is necessary (Marquis & Huston, 2015). The group is then aware of the need for change.

Change Stage. This is the second stage of the change process, also called the action stage (Burnes, 2020). Individuals realize that a change is necessary and prepare to accept the change (Schein, 1996). Additionally, the forces that are competing for the change are much greater than those that are against it. Once the necessary actions are taken to bring about the change, then further steps must be taken to apply the change, such as proper dissemination of information along with all of the necessary activities to ferment the change (Burnes, 2020).

Refreezing Stage. This is the final step in the change process. This stage involves all of the efforts that are made to sustain the implemented change (Burnes, 2020). Plans are put in place to ensure that the change remains a permanent feature (Shirey, 2013). The planned theory was appropriate for this research study as individuals needed to change their perceptions and ideology about and against LGBTQ people. The planned changed involves a process that individuals have to maneuver before a change in attitude and behavior can be accomplished.

Theory of Resilience

This theory was presented by Garmzey et al. (1984) to explain how resilience impact the lives of individuals. Resilience, according to Garmzey et al., looks at the measures, ideas, and strategies an individual would take while having to deal with negative, stressful, disruptive, and life-changing events. Employing a resilient attitude would allow LGBTQ students to circumvent the negative impacts of discrimination and prejudice on their overall well-being, especially their mental health processes (Garmzey et al., 1984; Schmitz & Tyler, 2019). Resiliency can be learned by the individual; it is free moving, intricate, and the forms vary (Garmzey et al., 1984). For example, the theory presented by Garmzey et al. proposed three models to explain resilience: (a) the compensatory model, (b) the challenge model, and (c) the protective factor.

Compensatory Model. This strategy states that stress can cause the individuals to feel as though they are unable to cope with a particular problem, but having a single support system can boost their self-esteem.

Challenge Model. The individual adjusts to the level of stress. For example, if the stress level is high, then this would cause the individual to display negative behaviors.

Protective Factor. This factor is one that identifies a potential harm and reduces it before an adverse occurrence occurs (Garmzey et al., 1984).

However, resilience is greatly influenced by personal, family, and significant others support and backing (Schmitz & Tyler, 2019). It also encourages and empowers the individual to cope and manage stressors. Diversity in tertiary education institutions signifies an inclusive community where students encounter other individuals who are dissimilar in regard to their beliefs, culture, ethnic background, sexual orientation, gender and languages (Chin & Trimble, 2015). Furthermore, academic diversity promotes an

environment that allows for freedom of association, expressions, and civility. Chin and Trimble (2015) illustrated that a diverse setting promotes and encourages acceptance of others who have different perspectives, experiences, and life experiences.

Experiences of LGBTQ Students

Students' experiences in school usually influence their mental, physical, and social well-being (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Truong et al., 2020). Besides, a positive school experience is usually filled with great expectations. For example, the students hope to meet new people, form lasting friendships with both peers and faculty members, and obtain a degree (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Several research authors have suggested that, while in an academic institution, LGBTQ students face discriminatory and victimization practices and even rejection from their straight and heterosexual peers and faculty members (Baams et al., 2017; Day et al., 2016; Renn, 2010).

In the Rankin (2005) study, it was explained that college LGBTQ students experienced grave harassment and discrimination from their peers. Data were obtained from LGBTQ participants ($N = 1,669$) who were recruited from 14 different colleges and university campuses in the United States. The results indicated that 36% of the students had experienced harassment in some form, including name calling or misgendering (Rankin, 2005). Higa et al. (2014) also agreed that, while in an academic setting, LGBTQ students experience many forms of abuse. In a qualitative study with LGBTQ participants ($N = 68$), the objective was to determine which factors, either adverse or affirmative, impacted the students routinely (Higa et al., 2014). The findings revealed that the adverse aspects were associated with various dominions, one of which was the negative school environment. Additionally, more than 50% of the LGBTQ participants declared that they were either verbally or physically abused while at school. The abuse included harmful

words, name calling, and missile throwing, along with other assaults and belligerent actions (Higa et al., 2014).

Truong et al. (2020) found that most LGBTQ students who experience school harassment and victimization do not report the event because they think that it is useless to do so, as they have proven that the report will be ignored or dismissed. Notably, the school environment is one of the main areas that the students feel unsafe and are usually reluctant to further bring exposure to themselves by speaking out about the abuse that they encountered for fear of revenge (Renn, 2010; Truong et al., 2020; Woodford et al., 2018). Furthermore, African American LGBTQ students have experienced twice as much abuse in regard to their skin color, sexual orientation, and gender identity when compared to other LGBTQ students (Rankin, 2005).

The lived experiences of 23 secondary and public university Chinese LGBTQ students in Hong Kong were assessed using a qualitative approach (Kwok, 2016). The research sought to detail the problems that the LGBTQ students faced while in the academic environment. It was divulged that more than half of the students hid their sexual identity from their family and friends due to disclosure fears. Therefore, the research interviews had to be conducted privately so as not to expose the students' gender identity (Kwok, 2016). It is important to note that individuals who were gay would not be accepted into Chinese schools. Despite hiding their identity, the students told of being called unsavory names and receiving unfair treatment by teachers and classmates who suspected that they were not heterosexual (Kwok, 2016). In addition, the students also stated that many of their colleagues adamantly believed that religion and cultural practices made being an LGBTQ individual a sinful act.

A study by Craig et al. (2017) exposed the experiences of LGBTQ past and

current students who had attended or were attending a religious college or university in the United States. An online project was established to collect anonymous data from the participants ($N = 271$). The students had to complete and submit a narrative about their experience in addition to describing the religious school experience of another LGBTQ student (Craig et al., 2017). Moreover, the findings of the study revealed that religious colleges and universities were the same as other nonspiritual institutions regarding the unfair and biased treatment of LGBTQ students. It was preached that (a) the college was not receptive to LGBTQ students; (b) the LGBTQ students were afraid to come out and expose their sexual orientation or gender; (c) the students experienced some form of mental health issues, mainly depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts; and (d) the students were afraid of the unknown (Craig et al., 2017).

The students also outlined that they received a lot of name calling and physical assaults, especially if their peers suspected that they were not heterosexual (Craig et al., 2017). Moreover, the students did not report if they went to counseling or psychotherapy care when they were mentally and physically abused by their peers. The abuse caused the students to feel lonely and guilty, and they hated themselves and were confused particularly in regard to their sexual identity. Furthermore, the students indicated that they really wanted to hide their identity, made attempts to do so, and explained that they would have benefited from counseling but were reluctant to actually seek help (Craig et al., 2017).

Gutierrez (2021) explained the attitudes of Taiwanese college students towards LGBTQ students. The report stated that the female college students were more accepting of LGBTQ students than the males. The male students were described as having a more negative, emotional, and behavioral attitude towards the gay men than to the lesbian

students (Gutierrez, 2021). Additionally, the researchers concluded that the bias and discriminatory attitude towards LGBTQ students in a Taiwan university occurred far less frequently than the ones experienced by LGBTQ students in the United States.

Regardless of the negative attitudes and behaviors that are displayed towards LGBTQ students, research has shown that there are some heterosexual students who do not know how to readily interact with this minority group (Kosciw et al., 2017; Maruca et al., 2016; Stroup et al., 2014). For example, baccalaureate nursing students' negative attitudes towards LGBTQ patients occurred due to a lack of LGBTQ curricular content (Maruca et al., 2016). In the research study, it was identified that the students ($N = 48$) did not and were reluctant to care for transgender patients during a clinical rotation due to lack of knowledge (Maruca et al., 2016). Moreover, the students had to be given additional LGBTQ curricular content, which included a simulation exercise to assist with the teaching of nursing care to LGBTQ patients. Consequently, after the training sessions, the nursing students' attitudes, behavior, and nursing care had improved towards the LGBTQ patients (Maruca et al., 2016).

Autistic LGBTQ college students have also stated that they encountered various degrees of discrimination and abuse while in the academic setting (Miller et al., 2020). Examples include being called by the wrong gender, name being ignored, or experiencing shaming. Through a narrative inquiry, the researchers examined eight autistic LGBTQ undergraduate and graduate students to ascertain their management of both their identities while in school (Miller et al., 2020). The students admitted that they mainly hid their identity, and, whenever they did disclose it, their colleagues were actually surprised and felt uncomfortable with their LGBTQ confession (Miller et al., 2020). Moreover, they found that their peers, the schoolteachers, and staff members were much more

accepting of and comfortable with their autistic disability but not with the LGBTQ admission. It was falsely discerned that the students did not know the meaning of the acronym LGBTQ and erred when they admitted to being one (Miller et al., 2020).

Snow (2018) used a qualitative content analysis within a phenomenological tradition to examine the blog posts ($N = 22$) of past and current LGBTQ students, as it pertained to their spirituality and sexual orientation while attending a Christian university. The researcher stated that blogs are similar to diaries where a great deal of information is chronicled (Snow, 2018). Additionally, the internet was searched for blogs that were created by LGBTQ students. The results of the study revealed that the LGBTQ individuals in their blogs were more comfortable referring to themselves as gay instead of using the LGBTQ terminologies. They further described that their sexual orientation and religious beliefs were accepted in their universities and that they did not have any challenges (Snow, 2018). Besides, the students said they wanted to be recognized as being gay and a Christian and that they should receive a noteworthy support from their institution. Snow also called for college counselors to play a more vibrant role in the lives of LGBTQ students while they were enrolled in an academic institution. Typically, it is very difficult for college students to navigate college, and especially being LGBTQ makes it more difficult. Moreover, it was established that the academic counselors played a significant role by assisting LGBTQ students in their transitioning during their college journey (Snow, 2018).

The literature has stressed that LGBTQ students face all forms of bullying and victimization due to their sexual orientation and gender identity (Craig et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2020). The LGBTQ college students recounted stories of being misidentified, experiencing microaggression, and suffering from physical, mental, and social insults

(Kwok, 2016; Miller et al., 2020). On many occasions, the students were unaware of how to respond when they are confronted with negative actions (Craig et al., 2017). Besides, the students reacted by blaming themselves for the abuse and felt as though they brought it on themselves. Many LGBTQ students are too ashamed to report the abuse and victimization that they experienced, as no action will be taken on their behalf. It has been recorded that LGBTQ students in the academic setting have a vast number of issues and problems (Day et al., 2016; Higa et al., 2014; Snow, 2018).

Coming Out Experiences

The action of students coming out and admitting that they are LGBTQ individuals is filled with many personal and mental battles (Rizga, 2016). The process, as illustrated by Evans and Broido (1999), involves three stages. First, the individuals have to admit to themselves that they are gay, next they have to inform other gay people that they are gay, and, lastly, they must tell other heterosexual persons about their LGBTQ connection. This is not an easy process. In an early study with LGBTQ undergraduate students ($N =$ 20), Evans and Broido ascertained that the LGBTQ students who came out to their college roommates had a very positive experience. The students related that they used rainbow symbols on their personal belongings and referred to LGBTQ events during a conversation so as to inform their colleagues about their status (Evans & Broido, 1999). Some students understood what they were saying, whereas others did not. Beyond this, the researchers said that there were a few victimization and abuse actions, but the positive aspect was more prominent, and the students stated that they actually felt supported.

Nowadays, according to Wei and Liu (2019), younger Chinese LGBTQ students come out early, mainly at the high school level. Moreover, the students would admit to their peers, siblings, and friends about their sexual orientation and identity. Furthermore,

retrieving LGBTQ information from social media networks and the internet may have given the students the support and courage they needed to divulge the information. The students also related the problems they encountered when they came out which included anger, disbelief, rejection, and embarrassment from family and school colleagues (Wei & Liu, 2019).

Likewise, Rizga (2016) recounted the very difficult coming out story of a single gay high school student. The student told of being verbally and physically assaulted before he came out. He further admitted that his classmates ridiculed him based on their suspicions, but he later came out at a school event because he had made up his mind to reveal his true identity (Rizga, 2016). In addition, the participant said that he did not care what others said or thought about him, and this is what assisted him in overcoming the abuse and victimization that he eventually encountered.

Pryor (2015) observed that LGBTQ students who did not come out in middle or high school are generally reticent to come out in a tertiary institution and would therefore conceal their sexual identity. This finding is consistent with those of Patton (2011), who disclosed in a research study that African American men, while they were in the college environment, were reluctant and refused to admit that they were gay or bisexual. The participants ($N = 6$) stated that they feared the consequence of admitting that they were gay and were not heterosexuals despite pretending to be so (Patton, 2011). Because of this, the participants recounted how they experienced intense mental anguish, anxiety, and distress. A few ($n = 2$) stated that they had confided in a select group of college friends about their sexual orientation and identity but still desired to remain hidden (Patton, 2011).

Transgender college students explained that their coming out experience was

filled with anxiety and uncertainty (Pryor, 2015). The students said they were at first very reluctant to reveal their sexual identity but later decided to come out of the closet. Throughout the semester, the students found themselves being completely ignored and being treated with disdain by suspicious faculty members and their peer groups (Pryor, 2015). The students said that they were very sorry that they came out. The students stated that their coming out experiences included (a) being exposed by a teaching staff member who saw an internet posting, (b) attending class dressed as a female instead of a male, (c) identifying oneself as a male instead of a female in class and giving personal experiences, (d) telling others in the class about their sexual identity, and (e) ignoring personal insults after the confession (Pryor, 2015). In addition, the coming out experience was a very difficult and painful one for the LGBTQ participants.

The coming out experience for 22 Latino queer college men were fraught with negativity (Eaton & Rios, 2017). For example, the participants described encountering hostility, shock and disbelief from peers, loss of peer and family relationships, and even being shunned and banned from school and peer functions. Interestingly, 50% of the abuse and discriminatory remarks came from their friends and classmates. A few of the students admitted that, in order to cope with the negative responses, they pretended that the event never happened, downplayed the experience, and even blamed themselves for the maltreatment that occurred (Eaton & Rios, 2017). The students further divulged that the admission of being queer was an insult to their culture and family values, and the backlash they experienced was a very difficult period for them.

Alternatively, gay male college students are using the internet and social media platforms to disclose their sexual identity (Etengoff & Daiute, 2015). The researchers in the study found that the participants utilized the assistance of Facebook, Twitter, and

other online blogs to disclose and garner support for their sexual identity (Etengoff & Daiute, 2015). Furthermore, the students said they preferred to come out in a nonverbal manner because they feared disproval and rejection, and they were annoyed by hearing that being gay was wrong and sinful (Etengoff & Daiute, 2015). The participants also stated that they felt supported by the online community, and this support gave them the courage to later reveal their sexual identity to their significant others, both nationally and globally (Etengoff & Daiute, 2015). Despite the success of this revelation, other researchers have cautioned LGBTQ individuals from using an online format and have suggested that revealing their gender identity on the internet may result in cyberbullying and harassment (Kosciw et al., 2017).

An earlier publication related the coming out story of Ryan Grigsby, a college student who came out by writing a one-and-a-half-page letter to each of his college fraternity brothers (Marsh, 2000). Grigsby was very anxious and afraid to come out because he had heard of the horror stories of other individuals who came out. The narrative further explained that not all of his fraternity brothers were supportive or accepting of his admission; a few members ridiculed him and made antigay jokes within his hearing range (Marsh, 2000). Grigsby, feeling rejected, later moved out of his dormitory but still maintained a cordial relationship with his fraternity brothers, as he was relieved that he had come out of the closet despite the rejection he had encountered (Marsh, 2000).

Similarly, a recent documentation depicted the struggles that Fagan, a then young athletic female college student, had with her coming out experience as a gay individual at a Christian college (Blais, 2016). The student confessed that she was unhappy, experienced insomnia, and was existing just to please family members and friends but not

herself. After receiving an inspiring text message from a girlfriend, Fagan decided to disclose to her college roommate and best friend her true identity (Blais, 2016). The roommate was not accepting of her identity and told Fagan that God was displeased with her actions, as He does not condone gay relationships (Blais, 2016). Fagan later stated that the inspiring text message resonated with her throughout her college years and gave her the courage to disclose to relatives and friends that she was gay (Blais, 2016). Furthermore, Fagan iterated that she felt relieved she was out and did not care what other people thought about her.

Cooper and Brownell (2017) illustrated the unique coming out experiences of a few LGBTQ students in a college biology class. One noteworthy account was that of one participant who confessed that she came out by writing her lesbian identity on the class bulletin board. This resulted in a class ruckus. A heterosexual student verbally insulted her by calling her all sorts of unflattering names and later requested that she keep her gay identity to herself as they did not want to know about it (Cooper & Brownell, 2017). Furthermore, the students admitted that they believed that all students enrolled in the biology class were heterosexual individuals.

In another study, Roe (2015) interviewed participants who said that, when they came out as LGBTQ, they were particular to whom they came out. Furthermore, the students confessed that they were afraid of revealing their sexual identity and orientation because of fear of rejection and retribution, so they were selective about who to come out to. The participants recalled that they would carefully choose a particular person they trusted to come out to (Roe, 2015). Moreover, the LGBTQ students expected support and advice from their confidant, and this is exactly what they received.

In summary, it is important to note here that the coming out experience for

LGBTQ students can be a difficult and challenging process (Etengoff & Daiute, 2015).

Some researchers report positive coming out experiences for LGBTQ individuals,

whereas unfortunately others are not so fortunate and are rejected (Blais, 2016). In fact,

the actual coming out manner may be executed by many different forms for the

individual LGBTQ student. For instance, the students disclosed that they came out with

the assistance of (a) technology, which involved mainly blogs, social media platforms,

and text messaging; (b) face-to-face means, which involved just speaking to people; and

(c) using letter and email correspondence (Blais, 2016; Etengoff & Daiute, 2015; Marsh,

2000). However, all of the students admitted to experiencing verbal abuse,

marginalization, rejection, shaming, and victimization. Coming out has proven very

beneficial for some students, as it alleviates the distress of concealing their true identity

(Roe, 2015).

Academic Personnel Behaviors

Research has shown that many academic personnel members have mixed

reactions to associating with and teaching LGBTQ students (Hall & Rodgers, 2019;

Renn, 2010). In a research study, Hall and Rodgers (2019) examined the attitudes of

secondary school teachers ($N = 305$) towards LGBTQ students they were teaching. The

teachers, who ranged in age from 21 to 89 years, were asked to describe their attitudes

using a Likert scale towards gay marriages, gay authors, gay teachers, and their views on

same-sex sexual relationships. The results revealed that the teachers' attitudes towards

LGBTQ individuals and relationships were basically very negative and lacked empathy

and understanding (Hall & Rodgers, 2019).

Another survey by Kosciw et al. (2017) identified teachers' support of LGBTQ

students. It was discovered that LGBTQ students in education institutions experience

many issues and, most especially, anti-gay acts. Over 60% of LGBTQ students indicated

that, when they do report and describe to schoolteachers the assaults they experienced by

different individuals in the academic setting, they were usually advised to forget about

the incident and pretend that it did not happen (Kosciw et al., 2017). Additionally, 55.4%

of the students said that they preferred not to report the assaults because there would be

no actions taken by any of the academic workforce, and, at times, sadly, the faculty

members themselves joined in with the abuse (Davis, 2017; Kosciw et al., 2017).

Connected to this study is the documentation that school counselors are said to be

very supportive of LGBTQ students and are usually the advocates for them (Abreu et al.,

2020). The research study measured the following objectives: (a) to determine the

specific training school counselors needed to support LGBTQ students, (b) to determine

the ability of counselors to train other staff members, and (c) to note the support they

themselves would need to manage the students (Abreu et al., 2020). Using a qualitative

research design, approximately 174 individuals participated in the study. It was

discovered that many of the counsellors ($n = 117$) stated that they were not adequately

prepared to work with LGBTQ students (Abreu et al., 2020). The teachers stated that they

had very little to no support from the school administrative team to prepare them to deal

with LGBTQ students (Abreu et al., 2020). In addition, the counselors felt that they

needed training and financial support to better understand, work with, and manage

LGBTQ students.

Recently, Wailing and Roffee (2018) iterated that universities have to manage the

concerns of LGBTQ students. In a qualitative study with Australian LGBTQ university

students ($N = 16$), a social media network format was used to recruit the participants. The

sample of students was asked to share their views on college faculties' interactions with

LGBTQ students (Wailing & Roffee, 2018). In a personal private interview, the students spoke of having no support from the school faculty members or the school system, as well as feelings of betrayal and being ignored by the school administrative personnel (Wailing & Roffee, 2018).

Past and present LGBTQ students from Massachusetts schools also admitted that they were bullied and that the school health professionals offered little to no assistance (Reisner et al., 2020). In addition, it was revealed that, when dealing with the bullying of LGBTQ students, the school health professionals lacked the necessary knowledge and confidentiality, and they were not empathetic towards the students. The students divulged that they were sexually assaulted, as well as verbally and physically abused, and were even told by school health professionals that they had brought the abuse upon themselves because they were LGBTQ individuals and this was wrong (Reisner et al., 2020). Comparable to previous research, the study findings revealed that the school health professionals admitted that they would benefit from further training on LGBTQ interaction and management (Abreu et al., 2020; Hall & Rodgers, 2019).

Academic personnel attitudes towards the bullying and victimization of LGBTQ students must be changed in order to prevent adverse health reactions, mainly depression and suicide (Reisner et al., 2020). The students feared that the school health professionals were not confidential and that the professionals would tell others about their LGBTQ identity. According to Kurnianingsih et al. (2012), trust is a very important element in the teacher-student relationship. In a study with student participants ($N = 291$), it was determined that about 55.30% of the students trust their teacher totally because they feel that the teacher would be a source of support (Kurnianingsih et al., 2012).

Johns et al. (2019) also championed the need for school personnel to be more

supportive of LGBTQ students because faculty members can promote a more feasible and safer environment for the students. The majority of a student's day is usually spent at school; therefore, the school environment should be free from hostility, discrimination, and abusive actions that would cause long-term physical and mental damage to students, especially the minority population (Johns et al., 2019). There are actually large numbers of college faculty members who support LGBTQ students (Garvey et al., 2015; Preston & Hoffman, 2015).

In a qualitative report, Linley et al. (2016) screened LGBTQ college students ($N =$ 60) to uncover the supporting role of faculty members in their college matriculation. The participants described the support in terms of the following three forms: (a) speaking on their behalf when they were verbally abused, (b) incorporating LGBTQ issues in the curricula and allowing the students to share experiences during the class sessions, and (c) respecting the students, including addressing them by their preferred name and gender (Linley et al., 2016). In addition, the students felt very good about the support provided, and this resulted in a more positive college experience.

An online survey by Page (2017) examined the level of comfort of English-language arts teachers regarding LGBTQ matters in the classroom and the school environment (Page, 2017). The results revealed that more than half of the teachers stated that they were comfortable using LGBTQ curriculum and other resources inside the classroom and on the school campus. Interestingly, there was very low application regarding the curriculum and other resources (Page, 2017). The other teachers who were very religious and were against the LGBTQ community felt that the concept of same-sex relationships was wrong, as this was a complete sin against God (Page, 2017). Moreover, adding LGBTQ concepts to the school curriculum would not change the existing state of

affairs; it would take a more collective effort with all of the school personnel and students. Page (2017) added that academic faculty and staff members had mixed feelings about assisting LGBTQ students.

In summary, a vast majority of the research clarified that faculty and staff members mainly felt that they should be taught how to deal with, manage, and teach the LGBTQ students before they interact with them, as they did not know how to (Garvey et al., 2015; Linley et al., 2016; Preston & Hoffman, 2015). Additionally, research has shown that, while some of academic faculty and staff members support the LGBTQ students, many of them do not and would join in the abuse and victimization of the students (Page, 2017). Despite the negative connotations that LGBTQ college students face, many academic personnel members view themselves as allies and advocates to the students and would defend and assist them as necessary (Linley et al., 2016).

Academic Campus Climate

An important aspect of any school is its climate (Garvey et al., 2015). A school climate refers to all the space that surrounds the students during their daily commute in school, including, for example, the students' interactions with both peers and faculty members, safety and security measures, and having a sense of connection with the school (Colvin et al., 2019; Garvey et al., 2015; Rankin et al., 2013). The academic climate can be aloof, unfriendly, and hostile for LGBTQ students, as this is where a lot of the abuse and victimization occurs (Kosciw et al., 2020; Renn, 2010; Woodford et al., 2018). Regardless of the negative actions, academic institutions have the obligation to create and maintain a campus environment that is safe and free from hostility and negative connotations (Davis, 2017; Rankin et al., 2013). Furthermore, the environment should be one that can assist the students with achieving their academic goals.

In a national biennial school climate survey, Kosciw et al. (2020) inquired about the cause of LGBTQ students' negative school climate. It was illustrated that the school experience for the LGBTQ student is extremely difficult, and many are unable to cope with the distress of it (Kosciw et al., 2020). More than half of the LGBTQ students gave reports of boycotting school functions, school truancy, experiencing cyberbullying, unwanted touching, unfair school polices, and other biased rules (Kosciw et al., 2020). One noteworthy example is that of the LGBTQ students being asked to use restrooms that were assigned to their previous gender instead of their new assigned gender (Kosciw et al., 2020). Moreover, the students were insulted and became extremely depressed and could not cope with the stifling and biased school environment. Dau and Strauss (2016) confirmed that over 50% of the LGBTQ students screened in his research study did not divulge their sexual orientation to others for fear of harassment, retaliation, and discrimination. Being LGBTQ also causes students to be excluded from many campus social activities and clubs (Dau & Strauss, 2016; Kosciw et al., 2020). However, the environment of a school campus for LGBTQ students may vary, as different experiences may occur to individual scholars.

Tetreault et al. (2013) chronicled that LGBTQ students' attitudes also played a significant role in the way they were treated. For example, LGBTQ students who hid their identity and had faculty and peer challenges disclosed that the school environment was hostile (Tetreault et al., 2013). It was assumed that their peers suspected that they were either lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer and criticized them for not disclosing their affiliation (Tetreault et al., 2013). However, according to Rankin (2005), students who make known or display their sexual orientation and/or gender identity usually experience an excessive amount of verbal and physical abuse. Remarkably, the

students who disclosed their identity and exhibited a nonchalant attitude had a more

pleasing encounter in the school environment than the others who remained closeted

(Tetreault et al., 2013).

In another research study, Toman (2019) attested that LGBTQ medical students

withheld their identities in order to advance through medical school. The aim of the

research study was to ascertain the experiences of LGBTQ students ($N = 12$) while in

medical school (Toman, 2019). The participants were recruited by a snowball sampling

method from four different medical schools in the United States. Findings of the research

study revealed that all of the participants were unwilling to openly come out and admit

that they were a member of the LGBTQ community (Toman, 2019). Besides, the students

feared repercussions and did not trust any of the faculty members because they had

witnessed their instructors making unflattering comments about LGBTQ patients and

other individuals. The researcher concluded that all races and ethnic groups, including

LGBTQ medical students, experience stigma along with discrimination, but Black

LGBTQ students would also face racism and injustice (Toman, 2019).

College athletes have also admitted that they are LGBTQ individuals (Pariera et

al., 2019; Slater, 2013). In order to ascertain the positive or negative attitudes that

LGBTQ athletic college students encountered, Pariera et al. (2019) undertook an

investigation of students while enrolled in undergraduate studies at a U.S. college. It was

required that the LGBTQ student participants relate their experiences and discuss how

their heterosexual team members responded to their gay or lesbian identity confession

(Pariera et al., 2019). The researchers in the qualitative study used a convenience and

snowball sampling method to gather the participants ($N = 259$) and later submitted the

following results: (a) most of the co-players had little to no concerns with playing with

the LGBTQ teammates, (b) LGBTQ teammates admitted that they experienced discriminatory remarks from others, (c) the university was not impartial to LGBTQ student players, and (d) male LGBTQ athletes were more likely to be discriminated against than the females (Pariera et al., 2019).

Similar to the earlier results of Rankin (2005), Lewis and Ericksen (2016) found that African American college LGBTQ students experience even more bullying and discriminative actions when compared to other races. The researchers in the study employed a focus group method to elicit information on how LGBTQ students were treated at a black university (Lewis & Ericksen, 2016). In total, six LGBTQ students were recruited along with 30 faculty members to address the research questions and also to describe the university's climate and support systems (Lewis & Ericksen, 2016).

The findings of the study offered the following five conclusions by both students and faculty members:

1. Training matters about LGBTQ information should be instituted so that academic personnel would know how to deal with them.

2. An established LGBTQ organization on campus would have a positive effect on the health and well-being of LGBTQ students. Suicide and depression are very common an established organizations may assist the students with their challenges.

3. LGBTQ students need more support from all faculty and staff levels of the university.

4. The students can successfully complete their courses once they are in a positive environment.

5. Policies should be established to assist all members of the school environment and to protect the rights of LGBTQ students (Lewis & Ericksen, 2016).

Tracing college campus climates from 1944 through 2013, Garvey et al. (2017) embarked on a study that included former LGBTQ college students who had completed a baccalaureate degree in the United States within the 70-year time frame. The study's participants ($N = 3{,}121$) had to respond specifically about their perceptions of the college climate during the years they were in attendance (Garvey et al., 2017). Some of the findings included information from the time frame of the following years:

1. Between 1940 and 1970, LGBTQ students would not be accepted or allowed to attend a college. Students hid their identities, which caused mental health problems. If discovered, scholarships would be revoked and the students would be enlisted in the U.S. Navy.

2. Between 1990 and 1997, LGBTQ students who revealed their identities caused a negative impact on their academic journey.

3. The years of 2000 to 2006 saw the emergence of change. LGBTQ students were more visible on college campuses (Garvey et al., 2017).

4. Between 2007 and 2010, students who had LGBTQ faculty members had a more positive college experience than others who did not (Garvey et al., 2017).

5. The years of 2010 to 2013 established that the campus climate was mostly unfriendly and hostile.

Garvey et al. further suggested that campus climates for LGBTQ students can be improved an attitude change of students, faculty members, and the formation of policies to address issues, and acceptance along with respect for diverse individuals. Renn (2010) found that college climate for LGBTQ students had improved over 10 years, but there was still more work to be done to improve the standards that would give the students the view that they are welcome and safe.

Carter (2013), in a qualitative study, explored the experiences of four Black gay former undergraduate band members who attended an African American college. The participants were recruited by a snowball method where the students had to relate their experiences as gay college band students. The band members explained that they were very anxious and voiced that they all had very gruesome experiences being gay, Black, and in college (Carter, 2013). The participants expressed that the discrimination that they endured was very difficult and painful to disclose to others (Carter, 2013).

In summary, research has shown that the campus climate is a very important aspect of LGBTQ students' learning environment (Garvey et al., 2017; Toman, 2019). For example, it has a significant impact on the academic achievement, personal growth, and development of the students. The literature has revealed that the academic climate is usually very hostile and unwelcoming to the students, and they then feel isolated, hopeless, and rejected (Rankin et al., 2013). Colleges have to promote and establish an environment that is conducive to LGBTQ acceptance and learning, as a positive school climate is associate with high academic achievements (Colvin et al., 2019; Garvey et al., 2015; Rankin et al., 2013).

The abuse to which LGBTQ individuals are subjected can be associated with safety concerns, including anxiety, depression, and suicide (Lewis & Ericksen, 2016). In addition, many times, teachers do not intervene when LGBTQ students are being abused and may, sadly, participate in the abuse. The students may perhaps seek the support of the faculty members, but, when this is not forthcoming, they would usually become very hurt and distrustful of other teachers or staff members (Rankin et al., 2013). It is necessary for college campuses to create safe places and policies or legislation to prevent bullying of LGBTQ students and to thereby establish and promote a sense of belonging (Colvin et

al., 2019; Garvey et al., 2015; Rankin et al., 2013).

Unwanted Sexual Experiences and Substance Abuse

Another concern for LGBTQ college students on campus is that of sexual assaults, harassments, and stalking (DeKeseredy et al., 2017). In a study conducted at a midsize U.S. college, the researchers argued that LGBTQ students were at a higher risk for sexual assaults than the heterosexual students. The research study utilized data from both LGBTQ ($n = 427$) and heterosexual ($n = 4,966$) students. The results of the study revealed that the LGBTQ sample reported a higher incidence of sexual assaults than the heterosexual sample (DeKeseredy et al., 2017). For example, (a) 142 students told of being caressed and kissed and (b) 46 students spoke of being forced to have oral and vaginal sexual intercourse with an individual. Seventeen students told of being forced to have anal sex, and 66 gave reports of attempted and actual rape by known assailants. The sample of students also said that they were continuously stalked for no apparent reason (DeKeseredy et al., 2017).

A research study by Murchison et al. (2016) sought to determine whether unwanted sexual experience was associated with minority stress in LGBTQ undergraduates ($N = 763$). The participants were recruited from six U.S. colleges to complete an online survey pertaining to unwanted sexual experience and alcohol use (Murchison et al., 2016). The results revealed that the participants had engaged in complete unwanted sexual intercourse, which occurred either by a perpetrator or they themselves committed the act to other students. The students also confessed to alcohol binge drinking after they were sexually assaulted or that they had consumed large quantities of alcohol as a means of lessening or forgetting the assault (Murchison et al., 2016).

Fenkl et al. (2020) also acknowledged that LGBTQ college students who abused alcohol and drugs were at risk for engaging in risky sexual behaviors. The descriptive research study consisted of undergraduate students ($N = 408$) who were Hispanic ($n = 207$), Black ($n = 127$), and White ($n = 74$). A large majority of participants ($n = 400$) admitted to drinking five or more alcoholic beverages at a single time just 2 weeks prior to commencing the study (Fenkl et al., 2020). In addition, a few ($n = 75$) admitted to being sexually taken advantage of while they were under the influence of alcohol. Participants ($n = 130$) told that they were criticized for their substance abuse problem, and others ($n = 100$) told how they were insulted because of missing class on many occasions. The researchers concluded by calling for further research into LGBTQ substance use and misuse in college (Fenkl et al., 2020).

In fact, a large number of LGBTQ students, as reported by Baams and Russell (2021), displayed harmful behaviors in the form of alcohol abuse, risky sexual behavior, self-harm, and even suicidality when they were abused. At times, LGBTQ students find it very difficult or are just embarrassed to seek medical help and would rather stay away from a health care center (Baams & Russell, 2021; Parker, 2021). Alkandari (2020) explained that, when students are subjected to anxiety, it would most likely affect their mental and physical well-being. For instance, students would not be able to participate in school exercises, may be unhappy with the school, may feel extremely sad, and may even withdraw from the university (Alkandari, 2020).

In summary, based on the literature reviewed, substance abuse poses a real problem and challenge for many LGBTQ college students (Fenkl et al., 2020; Murchison et al., 2016). Furthermore, substance abuse has resulted in unwanted sexual activities, binge drinking, depression, discomfort, and other health-related issues, including suicide

attempts and contracting sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS. LGBTQ college students, due to victimization and discrimination practices, are extremely vulnerable to experiences that lead to adverse physical, mental, and social health well-being (Colvin et al., 2019; Fenkl et al., 2020; Murchison et al., 2016).

Student Academic Outcomes

According to Rankin et al. (2010), many LGBTQ students who are subjected to abuse from their peers, school faculty, and staff members usually have a disconnection with the teaching learning process. For instance, the students would usually absent themselves from the school, experience poor concentration, obtain very low grades, and would be unable to cope with the school environment (Rankin et al., 2010). Forbes (2020) explained that there are some college programs that are more receptive to LGBTQ learning than others. The researcher of the study conducted interviews of college LGBTQ student participants ($N = 20$) over a 2-year period to ascertain which college programs they were more likely to complete without any untoward incident (Forbes, 2020).

For instance, courses such as sociology and humanities allow for the free expression and discussion of gender-related topics into the written and oral exercises (Forbes, 2020). In addition, the research findings ascertained that the LGBTQ students favored these courses. In contrast, the researcher found that the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics disciplines were hostile fields to study, as they were unkind to LGBTQ students (Forbes, 2020). Additionally, the researcher remarked that the LGBTQ students felt unwanted in these discipline by both their peers and the faculty members. Likewise, the students avoided these studies.

Prior research has also verified that college courses in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics are not agreeable or accepting ones for LGBTQ students.

Interestingly, in 2016, Stout and Wright described the field of computer science as having unfriendly attitudes toward sexual minority students. The researchers found that LGBTQ students do not feel in tune or accepted within the computer science programs. In the study involving 857 undergraduate computer science students, 86 were LGBTQ individuals. The participants answered questions pertaining to why they thought about leaving their computer program course and to give their current grade point average (Stout & Wright, 2016). The results revealed that LGBTQ students, especially LGBTQ females, did not feel comfortable in the computer field courses. The students told of the unfriendly attitudes of both the faculty members and their peers towards them, and they also felt isolated from the group (Stout & Wright, 2016). In addition, they also received failing grades, which resulted in low grade point averages.

Similarly, in a national survey, Kosciw et al. (2020) further disclosed the effects of victimization and abuse on the academic advancement of LGBTQ students. The report outlined that the students were reluctant to attend and would absent themselves from school (Kosciw et al., 2020). The students also had low self-esteem, failed courses, were very depressed, and contemplated suicide. This resulted in the students being unable to cope and relate to the academic environment (Kosciw et al., 2020). Engineering education programs have the same problems of victimization and abuse as do all the other college programs that are attended by LGBTQ students (Cech & Rothwell, 2018). In a 2018 research study, Cech and Rothwell found that LGBTQ students were treated poorly, whereas heterosexual students were respected in an engineering program. Moreover, three areas of students' inequality were acknowledged:

1. The students experienced marginalization, which also included hearing and reading humiliating remarks, feeling isolated within the class, and experiencing school

fatigue.

2. The students felt that they had to go beyond the expected class limit to be academically and socially successful.

3. As a result of the victimization, the students experienced physical, mental, social, and emotional health challenges (Cech & Rothwell, 2018).

Cech and Rothwell remarked that the inequalities affected LGBTQ students in every facet of their lives, including peer and faculty relationships, the engineering program, and family life. Likewise, the students received very poor grade point averages and would absent themselves from the class on many occasions. At the end of the study, the researchers made an appeal for more research into this area and called for members of the engineering faculty to positively assist the LGBTQ students in every way possible (Cech & Rothwell, 2018).

In a qualitative study, Hoefer and Hoefer (2017) used a snowball sampling method to recruit LGBTQ college students to share their experiences and views on a sex education curriculum that purported abstinence and explain whether it had prepared college LGBTQ students for adult relationships. Additionally, the student participants ($N = 16$) were instructed to answer questions pertaining to (a) when they were first introduced to sexual education, (b) how the information was presented, (c) and if were they taught about sexually transmitted diseases and contraception. The findings of the research revealed the following:

1. The students had very little practical sexual education and were frustrated by this because they had to rely on other sources for the information that they needed.

2. The students felt they were unprepared to protect themselves when they encountered challenging sexual situations.

3. The sex education classes were separated by gender, so there was bias information reporting. The education came from one particular gender since females and males were not together during the classes.

4. The participants felt that they were not allowed to speak or make contributions during the sex education discussion and stated that they did not benefit from the classes as they learnt nothing and felt it was a waste of their time.

5. The students learnt about sexually transmitted diseases and contraception from their acquaintances and felt that they were not prepare for adult relationships (Hoefer & Hoefer, 2017).

Based on the research reviewed in this section, it is noted that victimization and bullying have a profound effect on the lives and academic abilities of the LGBTQ individuals (Cech & Rothwell, 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020). Many students are unable to perform as adequately in an academic setting as they should due to the mental distress they experience as a result of the abuse that they experience. The literature has revealed that some university disciplines, such as the humanities, are more accepting and tolerant of LGBTQ students than others, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Forbes, 2020). Furthermore, students have very poor grade point averages and engage in school truancy.

Other Health-Related Concerns

Bullying in any form affects the health and wellbeing of a person especially those who have identified themselves as being an LGBTQ individual (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). In a study conducted by Wolke and Lereya (2015), 245 participants were screened to assess their victimization experiences and determine whether it had any effect on their mental health. The results revealed that the female LGBTQ students experienced less

victimization than the males (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). However, the queer and transgender individuals encountered more victimization than the other LGBTQ subgroups. It was concluded that antagonistic LGBTQ behaviors cause mental health problems, mainly depression, anxiety, and suicide ideation, in LGBTQ students (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Moran et al. (2018) disclosed that LGBTQ student bullying has a strong association with depressive disorder. In the study with LGBTQ participants, the students sadly admitted to receiving one or all of the following forms of bullying: "cyber, physical, relational, and verbal" (Moran et al., 2018. p. 880). In addition, the most common form was verbal victimization, which was two times more harmful than physical abuse.

Evidence has revealed that LGBTQ students in Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam universities also experience stress and mental health issues when they become targets of victimization and bullying schemes (Peltzer & Pengpid, 2016). In a study conducted by Peltzer and Pengpid (2016), the purpose was to assess addictive behaviors, along with the physical and mental health status of LGBTQ students enrolled in universities located in Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. The LGBTQ participants ($N = 3,240$) admitted that, within 1 year, they experienced the following activities: (a) 43.0% had experienced severe depression symptoms, (b) 33.5% had attempted suicide more than once, (c) 14.0% had used illicit drugs including cocaine, (d) 28.6% had used hazardous alcohol, and (e) 31.4% had experienced posttraumatic stress disorder (Peltzer & Pengpid, 2016). Furthermore, the study concluded with a call for prevention and interventions measures to decrease LGBTQ students' morbidity and mortality rates.

Students who aligned themselves as being LGBTQ would not be accepted in a

Nigerian university (Mapayi et al., 2016). In fact, this is an offense that is punishable with death by stoning or a prison term of at least 14 years. In a research study, Mapayi et al. (2016) discovered the knowledge and attitudes of tertiary education students ($N = 500$) towards homosexuality. The participants had to respond to a 25-item questionnaire where the results publicized the following: (a) about 97.8% of the students knew about homosexuality, (b) only 36.8% knew an LGBTQ individual, and (c) 7.2% believed that LGBTQ students were acceptable (Mapayi et al., 2016).

Overall, Mapayi et al. (2016) found that the heterosexual students had a very negative attitude towards their LGBTQ peers. It was concluded that the LGBTQ students would remain hidden, meaning not exposing their gender to avoid any discrimination problems. However, this action would eventually predispose the LGBTQ students to mental health and other health issues due to the extreme discrimination and unaccepting behaviors from others. Student mental health issues would also lead to cognitive challenges, which can be seen manifested in a decreased in grade point averages, absenteeism, and eventually college withdrawal (Mapayi et al., 2016; Oswalt et al., 2020).

Vespone (2016) summarized that attending a Christian college may be more strenuous for LGBTQ students than attending a non-religious one. The students have to circumvent both Christian and LGBTQ individualities, which also incorporates victimization, bullying, stigma, and negative school climates (Vespone, 2016). Due to the abuse they encounter, the students would experience and exhibit depressive disorders and may abuse alcohol and use illicit drugs. Knowing this dilemma, Vespone asserted that all colleges need to offer avenues for LGBTQ students to access support to help them to maintain a stable and functioning mind. A fundamental idea is to have a campus

counseling center where the counselors can be advocates for the students and help them to complete their college degrees in a safe, nonthreatening environment (Vespone, 2016). Nonetheless, group counseling offers the capacity for students to build stronger bonds with other students and allows the students to share and explore their experiences and problem solve in a caring environment that is conducive to learning (Vespone, 2016).

In a quantitative, analytic, cross-sectional study, Dragowski et al. (2011) aspired to discover how sexual orientation victimization contributed to the manifestation of posttraumatic stress disorder in LGBTQ individuals. The study consisted of college and university students ($N = 258$) who were recruited from the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. The participants were required to answer questions pertaining to their sexual experiences, mental health disorders, coming out experiences, and incidents of abuse and victimization and disclose how these factors affected their psychological wellbeing (Dragowski et al., 2011). The findings of the research study revealed that the participants disclosed their identity years prior to the onset of the study and reported that, by doing so, they all experienced repeated abuse, including victimization and oppression (Dragowski et al., 2011).

The participants confirmed that the posttraumatic stress disorder occurred as a result of all the continuous psychological, physical, and social abuse to which they were subjected (Dragowski et al., 2011). Furthermore, they spoke of being threatened with weapons, name calling, having objects thrown at them and continuous, and unrelenting verbal attacks. These harmful acts resulted in the participants experiencing signs and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (Dragowski et al., 2011). For example, the participants spoke of experiencing insomnia, hysteria, visual and auditory hallucinations, and generalized malaise. The researchers also called for schools and other institutions to

create laws and policies that would protect the rights of the LGBTQ individuals and to punish those who transgress against the law by abusing this minority group (Dragowski et al., 2011).

The findings of Kerr et al. (2014) revealed that substance abuse is higher in LGBTQ students than in heterosexual college students. With a sample size of 65,291 participants, where 3264 identified themselves as belonging to the LGBTQ subgrouping, the researchers proposed to determine undergraduate college students' tobacco and other drug use habits, along with the adverse side effects of alcohol ingestion (Kerr et al., 2014). In the study, the researchers used a quantitative research method that included convenience nonprobability sample without sample weighting to collect the answers to the research questions. It was discovered that LGBTQ individuals abused the following items: marijuana, cocaine, tobacco products, analgesics, and antidepressant medications (Kerr et al., 2014). Additionally, they engaged in unprotected sex and one-night stands, attempted suicide, and experienced severe mental health issues and challenges. The researchers concluded with a call for universities and colleges to develop and sustain programs that will support LGBTQ students in a positive manner (Kerr et al., 2014). Their study added to the literature by verifying that LGBTQ students are using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs more frequently than heterosexual students (Kerr et al., 2014).

Simone et al. (2020) examined the occurrence rate of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa in regard to sexual identity and orientation within a 1-year period in LGBTQ university students in Minnesota through an analysis of the 2015-2018 College Student Health Survey using data from 27 colleges. Simone et al. found that the rates of eating disorders were higher in lesbians and gay students than in the heterosexual ones. In addition, the eating disorder also affected the students' academic performance, as they

either left school early or did very poorly in the subject areas. Interestingly, the eating disorders occurred because of the victimization and the abuse to which the students were subjected (Simone et al., 2020). Moreover, a few of the students admitted that they had been struggling with the eating disorders for more than a year and were extremely depressed by their diagnosis. The research findings provide support for the minority stress theory that LGBTQ students have higher rates of eating disorders than heterosexual students (Simone et al., 2020).

According to Hood et al. (2019), LGBTQ students are also treated unfairly when they access campus heathcare services. In an exploratory study, the researchers interviewed a convenience sample of 14 LGBTQ college students about their perceptions of and experiences at their campus healthcare services within a public university in the United States. The findings of the study revealed that the university was not meeting the needs of the LGBTQ students (Hood et al., 2019). Moreover, the students spoke of how they (a) were misgendered, (b) experienced nonverbal insults, (c) found the staff were not aware of how to care for LGBTQ patients, (d) and did not reveal their gender identity.

Furthermore, the participants felt that the healthcare staff members were not actually malicious or were not being deliberately hostile in their dealing with them, but the staff members just had a lack of knowledge regarding the interaction and care of LGBTQ students as patients. The participants reiterated that their university should make the training for being an LGBTQ ally mandatory for all university staff members because this would ensure that they are well versed on how to care and work with all students, including ones who are LGBTQ (Hood et al., 2019). It is apparent here that the literature has documented that LGBTQ students have unique health needs (Dragowski et al., 2011; Kerr et al., 2014). In addition, they are subjected to bullying, victimization, and abuse in

various forms, and these can have a toll on their mental, physical, and social health and well-being. They have also experienced mental health issues, such as suicide ideation, anxiety and depression, rejection, and isolation (Alkandari, 2020; Moran et al., 2018).

Academic Campus Support

According to Gristy (2012), peer relationships are important in the lives of adolescents as a sense of belonging is established, along with school connectedness and acceptance. A study by Roe (2015) was undertaken to ascertain the experience of LGBTQ students with peer relationships and support using a phenomenological inquiry approach. Through comprehensive interviews, it was discovered that peer relationships interactions were extremely valued, and the students felt supported by it (Roe, 2015). According to Roe, the students also divulged that they usually came out to their peers before anyone else, and, if they accepted them, this would boost their morale. They were happiest and felt even more acceptance when other LGBTQ students and faculty members rendered support to them (Roe, 2015).

Moreover, the students had placed a lot of emphasis on peer relationships because they contributed positively to their mental and social well-being. A similar study by Moran et al. (2018) found that LGBTQ students valued the support that they received from peers more than anyone else. The study surveyed a sample of 347 students from the United States using the Survey Monkey online platform (Moran et al., 2018). The students iterated that they valued and pursued peer support more than familial support (Moran et al., 2018). Despite the peer support they received, the LGBTQ students still experienced anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

Additionally, the formation of Gay-Straight Alliance clubs and school supportive policies should be established in every academic setting (Day et al., 2020). In a study

conducted by Day et al. (2020), the researchers recruited participants from three urban

cities in the United States to answer questions pertaining to the establishment of a Gay-

Straight Alliance group and whether they felt supported by the group. Also, they were

asked about LGBTQ support policies at their campus. The students who had a Gay-

Straight Alliance on campus reported that the presence of this club meant that the

bullying and victimization were less (Day et al., 2020). In addition, the students revealed

that LGBTQ-established policies resulted in their peers, teachers, and school

administrative team being more respectful to them, and the aggressive gender-based

bullying was significantly reduced (Day et al., 2020). According to Day et al., students

who attended colleges that did not have an on-campus Gay-Straight Alliance group or

LGBTQ policies reported experiencing a high incidence of verbal and physical abuse

from both their peers and teachers. Moreover, the researchers found that having an on-

campus Gay-Straight Alliance without school policies still boded well for LGBTQ

students (Day et al., 2020).

In a quantitative study, Snapp et al. (2015) sought to discover if the study

participants, which consisted of 1,232 Californian students from 154 schools, felt safer

and more respected when LGBTQ information was incorporated into the school

curriculum. The participants were invited via an online survey to identify and state

whether they had learned about LGBTQ information from their school courses (Snapp et

al., 2015). The students revealed that subjects that included the arts spoke about LGBTQ

issues and gave them a sense of safety and security. The researchers concluded that a

supportive and inclusive curriculum would help promote a safer environment for LGBTQ

students, which would minimize bullying and other discriminatory acts against LGBTQ

individuals (Snapp et al., 2015).

Research by Feldkamp (2016) identified an ally as a support resource for LGBTQ students and an individual who assists with and supports the cause of others. In the qualitative research methods study, which included the use of a focused group with University of Wisconsin-Stout staff members, the participants were requested to disclose what they thought an ally meant and to include the description of the role and functions (Feldkamp, 2016). The results of the study revealed that individuals who desire to be an ally should have the following four virtues: (a) individuals should respect the spaces of others; (b) individuals should accept people for who they are, which is respecting others who are diverse; (c) individuals should search the print and electronic media for information as needed to understand the diversity of a particular group; (d) individuals should be advocates for the group being represented (Feldkamp, 2016).

Smith (2015) explored the role of teachers in the northeastern United States who deemed themselves to be LGBTQ friendly. The participants were heterosexual teachers ($N =13$) who were allies or supporters of LGBTQ students. They were interviewed to determine the reasons why they were supportive of LGBTQ students. The participants said that they felt that all students were important and should not be discriminated against (Smith, 2015). Furthermore, the teachers said they were very professional towards all students and taught their classes properly with caring and accepting attitudes. Besides, they always endeavored to promote and maintain a classroom environment that is free from overt bias and unaccepting behaviors (Smith, 2015). Therefore, with this attitude, the LGBTQ students would feel a sense of belonging and value, and they would be able to thrive academically, socially, and personally.

Relevant to this study, Mundy (2018) examined the advocacy policies of 10 universities in the United States regarding the management of their LGBTQ students. The

study engaged a qualitative method with the use of an indepth interview format via Skype

with the LGBTQ directors of the participating universities. It was discovered that most of

the campuses had the three same goals: (a) advocacy, (b) support, and (c) education of

the LGBTQ students. Furthermore, the students were supported from admission through

graduation (Mundy, 2018). The students were also provided with safe spaces, where non-

biased attitudes and psychological encouragement were provided.

In addition, Mundy (2018) stated that the universities had established peer-to-peer

mentoring and counseling programs, where LGBTQ students would benefit from

speaking with a member of their peer group in a quiet nonthreatening atmosphere.

Advocacy also included giving LGBTQ students the counseling center staff members'

personal telephone numbers so that they could contact them (Mundy, 2018). Using

hidden Facebook groups was also very advantageous, as confidentiality is a key

component in the supportive role (Mundy, 2018). In addition, the universities realized

that the supportive role requirements of LGBTQ students are not static but are constantly

evolving; therefore, they have to update their programs on a continual basis (Mundy,

2018).

Todorinova and Ortiz-Myers (2019) detailed the results of a qualitative study that

was performed to determine the role and importance that librarians and library service

play in the life of LGBTQ students in an academic setting. The researchers in the study

surveyed the top 25 Campus Pride colleges and universities regarding the library

services, along with policies that were offered to LGBTQ students. One or two academic

personnel from each institution was used to participate in the study (Todorinova & Ortiz-

Myers, 2019). The results revealed that the librarians supported the LGBTQ students,

despite many of them admitting to not receiving any formal training to interact with the

students (Todorinova & Ortiz-Myers, 2019). Additionally, the students were able to find academic content in the library as it pertained to LGBTQ concerns.

The study also revealed that only one of the institutions had gender-neutral facilities, but the others had implemented other practices and policies that were LGBTQ friendly (Todorinova & Ortiz-Myers, 2019). Furthermore, this action would indicate, according to the researchers, that the institutions supported and accepted LGBTQ students. The study was concluded with the researchers calling for the addition of gender-neutral facilities in all universities and colleges, which includes restrooms and the ability of LGBTQ students to have a preferred name or an alias on the library register of their school (Todorinova & Ortiz-Myers, 2019).

According to Young and McKibbin (2013), Safe-Zones training programs are also great support for LGBTQ students. The mandate of Safe Zones is to provide noticeable support for LGBTQ students while they are in an academic institution. In other words, the Safe-Zones leader should always focus on the unique needs of the students. The dynamics of these programs are varied depending on the different institutional organizations (Young & McKibbin, 2013). Safe-Zone training provides individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to interact with, care for, and encourage LGBTQ students in their academic journey and pursuits (Young & McKibbin, 2013). Also, the authors stressed that people who form the Safe-Zones programs need to be resilient, meaning they must be able to withstand the backlash because other people will try to destroy the work that was done. Additionally, Safe-Zones program coordinators need to motivate individuals who join the programs because they all have different reasons for attending the groups. The authors called for the establishment of more Safe Zones in schools, as the program is becoming a significant step in a more positive direction to

battle the abuse and victimization with which LGBTQ students are faced (Young & McKibbin, 2013).

Kosciw at al. (2013) also found that LGBTQ students, when they have faculty support, feel protected and are able to manage the academic environment in a more positive manner. For instance, the students usually remain in school and will strive to complete their program, and most will maintain a high grade point average. The study further revealed that supportive staff and faculty members can act as a buffer against the onslaught of abuse that the LGBTQ students often encounter and would be advocates for the students, thus boosting their morale and self-esteem (Kosciw at al., 2013).

Bardhoshi et al. (2018) indicated that the use of photovoice was a good medium to highlight the negative and positive events of LGBTQ college students. Accordingly, photovoice can use pictures to portray the ordeal that the students encounter on a daily basis. The pictures will ultimately garner community support for the LGBTQ students and influence the formation of policies and laws to effect change (Bardhoshi et al., 2018). In the study that took place within a midsize university, the researchers indicated that they instructed the participants ($N = 18$) to use their smart phones to capture pictures that contained no people to depict their daily campus experiences. The participants were then invited to an oral forum to discuss the information that was gathered from the pictures. Interestingly, the students took pictures of fruits, footwear, and buildings, as all of the items had meaning to them and represented either a negative or positive occurrence (Bardhoshi et al., 2018). The findings from the study revealed that the students experienced victimization, verbal attacks, discouragement, fear, and physical insults (Bardhoshi et al., 2018). Furthermore, the students spoke of finding support groups on the college campus to which they could relate.

It is important to note here that academic support for LGBTQ students can take on many forms (Mundy, 2018; Snapp et al., 2015). For example, peer support, groups and clubs, safe spaces, policies, and faculty member input are all important to LGBTQ students in tertiary institutions (Smith, 2015). Most of the researchers called for LGBTQ training before individuals become involved with this minority population. Based on the research, it was apparent that LGBTQ students feel supported when there are established policies and support for them in the school environment (Feldkamp, 2016; Moran et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the review of the literature revealed that there was substantial evidence to conclude that LGBTQ students in tertiary education settings are bombarded with many challenges and hardships (Abreu et al., 2020; Mapayi et al., 2016), primarily victimization and discrimination practices that ultimately lead to physical, social, and mental health problems for the students. There is a need for a change of attitudes from heterosexual peers and academic personnel to assist with the promotion of a feeling of safety and inclusion for LGBTQ students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were established to guide this applied dissertation:

1. What are the academic, social, and peer interactive experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled in a tertiary education institution in The Bahamas?

2. How do LGBTQ students describe their ease or discomfort with expressing their sexuality identification at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas?

3. What campus support and resources do LGBTQ students utilize at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to explore the challenges and issues encountered by LGBTQ students while enrolled in a tertiary institution to develop an understanding of their lived experiences, including their coping and management strategies. The LGBTQ students are considered marginalized and are subjected to abuse and victimization (Hoefer & Hoefer, 2017). The information gained from this research study will be able to assist other colleges and universities in The Bahamas in the creation of policies and programs to reduce the plight of LGBTQ students while they are a part of the academic setting.

Qualitative Research Approach

This research study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological research approach. The identified phenomenon for this research study was the examination of the lived experiences of LGBTQ students while enrolled in a Bahamian tertiary institution. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a phenomenological research design is one that allows a researcher to explore in depth the lived experiences of individuals by focusing on a specific incident or experience. Phenomenological research design permits the researcher to use empirical data that can provide different responses to an event (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Transcendental phenomenology, existential phenomenology, and interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) are three types of phenomenological research designs (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Langle & Klaassen, 2019; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Transcendental phenomenology involves a descriptive process where the researchers have to remain neutral and remove their own personal biases when

conducting this type of study (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Furthermore, contributing

significantly to the works of transcendental phenomenology in the 20th century was

Edmund Husserl, who asserted that the researcher's attitude and behavior can negatively

or positively influence the outcome of a research study. The existential phenomenology

describes individuals' lived experiences as they relate to the environment (Langle &

Klaassen, 2019). Moreover, it is said to be a people-focused approach. In the IPA

approach, the researcher's interpretations of the lived experience play a significant role

(Reiners, 2012). It was originated by Martin Heidegger, who stated that the researcher

possesses some knowledge about the topic under study, and the individual experience is

assessed along with the world around them (Reiners, 2012). In addition, in the IPA

approach, the individual engages in a reflective process of the phenomena, which allows

for an indepth exploration by the researcher (Tuffour, 2017).

Therefore, the study used an IPA approach. The objective of the study was to

examine the lived experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled in a Bahamian tertiary

institution. Furthermore, this research will bring about community awareness of the lived

experiences of LGBTQ while enrolled in a tertiary institution in The Bahamas and

promote the creation of laws and policies that would support the students' uniqueness. A

research study by Craig et al. (2017) used an IPA design to explore the lived experiences

of the social interactions of bisexual high school students with their peers. The findings

of the study revealed that the students experienced abuse and victimization.

Participants

The participants for this study were recruited from the cohort of undergraduate

students attending a Bahamian university. The researcher contacted the tertiary

institution's Student Affairs division for permission and assistance with sending emails to

the students and for the placement of flyers on the school bulletin boards about the proposed study. Additionally, social media platforms, such as Facebook and WhatsApp messenger, were used for recruitment. The profile on Facebook gave details about the study and invited the students to participate. The researcher also sent messages about the research study via WhatsApp messenger and asked the student recipient to send the message forward to other students. Several students also sent emails about the study to their friends.

Approval to conduct the study was sought and obtained from the Institutional Review Boards of Nova Southeastern University in the United States and the target tertiary institution in Nassau, Bahamas. Approximately seven undergraduate students were recruited to participate in the study. The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 30 years, and they were predominately males. There were five males and two females. They were descendants from The Bahamas and Haiti. The inclusion criteria requested that each participant possess the following parameters: (a) be a junior or senior LGBTQ college students and have spent at least 1 to 2 years or more at the university (b) be currently enrolled in the university, and (c) identify as LGBTQ. The exclusion criteria prohibited the entry of (a) freshman students and students who had spent less than 1 year at the university, (b) students who did not identify as being LGBTQ, and (c) individuals who were not enrolled in the university.

This researcher at first utilized a purposeful sampling method for participant selection, where one student was recruited. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), purposeful sampling is when a researcher intentionally selects participants to collect data related to the central phenomenon. The researcher also engaged in a snowball sampling method, which is a part of a nonprobability sampling technique of recruitment. Six

students were recruited using the snowball method. Etikan et al. (2015) cited that, in a snowball sampling method, the researcher will ask participants who are known to have a particular characteristic to recruit other participants who are the same to take part in the study. Furthermore, this method can assist the researcher in recruiting the correct sample that is needed. Once approval was obtained from the relevant institutions, the participants were invited to take part in the research study, which was inclusive of two 60-minute interviews that were based on their lived experiences in regard to their LGBTQ identity as a university student.

Data-Collection Tools

For this research study, the data source involved individual interviews using an interview protocol (see Appendix). There were two interviews that lasted approximately 60 minutes each and were conducted via face-to-face interaction. During the interview, the participants were asked open-ended questions that invited them to discuss their lived experiences as an LGBTQ individual in a tertiary institution. The interview protocol also captured their demographic information, which included the participants' gender, age, and sexual orientation.

The Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was created by the researcher and was based on the information that the researcher wanted to discover. It consisted of two sections labeled as Sections 1 and 2. Section 1 had eight questions that pertained to each participant's demographic information. The information collected pertained to the participant's age, years at the institution, preferred gender, and other important information. The interview protocol for Section 1 on demographics was created based on research conducted by Alkandari (2020), Baams and Russell (2021), Parker (2021), Lewis and Ericksen (2016),

and Kosciw et al. (2013). Section 2 consisted of 19 questions that pertained to the participants' lived experiences. The participants answered questions pertaining to their coming out, their experiences of being LGBTQ, and attending school. The interview protocol for Section 2 was created based on research conducted by Cooper and Brownell (2017), Eaton and Rios (2017), Higa et al. (2014), Liboro et al. (2018), Kerr et al. (2014), Rankin et al. (2013), Rizga (2016), and Roe (2015).

Trustworthiness and Validity of the Interview Protocol

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), trustworthiness in qualitative research communicates the efforts the study researchers have made to ensure that the results of the research are credible, which is the ability of being believed by others. Furthermore, internal validity is known as credibility and external validity as transferability in the qualitative research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, to establish trustworthiness, the instrument was given to an expert to be reviewed for alignment. This was to ensure clarity and that the instrument was addressing the research topic. An expert is an individual who has related experience and is knowledgeable about a particular subject area. Hoadley (2004) illustrated that alignment in research refers to the study's information being presented in a logical and clear sequence.

Procedures

The researcher sought Institutional Review Board approval from both Nova Southeastern University and the target Bahamian tertiary educational institution before commencing the study. After the approvals were obtained, the researcher requested the Student Affairs department to send emails to the student body to inform them about the study, which invited the relevant students to participate. Also, the researcher placed flyers on the university's bulletin boards and posted a message to Facebook to advertise the

research study. For the aforementioned, the researcher provided information about the purpose, rationale for the research study, and requirements for the selection of the student participants. The recruitment process took about 4 weeks to be completed and was undertaken within the first month that was August to September 2022.

After the researcher was contacted by the students expressing their interest to participate in the study, an email was sent to them with additional information about the study including the purpose, benefits, and risks. The consent form included general information about the study and a statement of confidentiality among others, was emailed to the participant. Additionally, the researcher obtained permission to record and transcribe the interview and take notes during the interviews utilizing the interview protocol. The consent process also informed the participants that they may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time and that all disclosures would be kept confidential.

The Interview Process

The interview process began after the consent forms were signed by the participants and was held within the second month. During this period, the participants were interviewed individually based on their availability. A schedule with the date and time was set up for each interviewee. Each participant was interviewed on two separate occasion for 60 minutes. The interview took place in a face-to-face format and was held in a classroom on the university campus. All COVID-19 protocols were enforced with mask wearing, sanitizing stations, and sitting six feet apart (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). The researcher explained the purpose of the study and asked the participants to answer questions pertaining to their lived experiences as LGBTQ university students.

The interviews were recorded with a handheld digital voice recorder and later stored on the researcher's computer, which was password activated in the Dropbox cloud storage system. In addition to recording the interview, the researcher also took notes in a notebook with a black ink pen. The audio information was transcribed to text via Google Docs, which is a free transcribing Google app. All of the collected information was stored in a locked cupboard in the researcher's office. The transcription of the information actually took place within the second month. These activities commenced after Institutional Review Board expert approval. Member checking was done to ensure the credibility of the information, meaning the transcribed documents were sent to each participant for them to read, review and verify the information. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), member checking involves establishing the credibility and trustworthiness of a research findings. The participants were given approximately 2 weeks to edit the document by adding or deleting information to and from it.

Time Line

The following outlines the time line and activities for implementing the research study once Institutional Review Board approval was obtained:

1. Month 1 involved the researcher contacting the Student Affairs Department to forward emails messages that had the research flyer attached. The students were invited and asked to share their experiences. The researcher also created a profile on Facebook, posted the Flyer to the university campus bulletin boards, and sent WhatsApp messages to students and faculty members to advertise the research study inviting the students to participate. The researcher initially wanted between 10 and 15 students to participate in the research study but was able to recruit only seven participants to be included in the study.

2. Month 2 commenced with the participants' permission being obtained to participate in the study, and the researcher then sent the consent form by email to them. After the signed consent forms were returned, the researcher scheduled interviews with participants based on their availability, and a schedule with date and time was formulated. Then the researcher collected data by conducting interviews, which were recorded.

3. Month 3 consisted of the researcher transcribing all of the recorded interviews. The transcribed interviews were sent to the participants for member checking, which also included data verification.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data for this study involved developing a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQ students in a Bahamian tertiary institution. The researcher utilized the steps of IPA to analyze the data, which allows researchers to establish a relationship with the participants, resulting in an indepth understanding of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Smith et al., 2009). For this study, the researcher collected data through individual interviews, which were coded, analyzed for patterns, categories, and themes related to the phenomenon under exploration (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Smith et al., 2009). The IPA consists of six steps that are used to interpret and analyze indepth interviews: (a) reading and rereading, (b) initial annotation, (c) development of emerging themes, (d) search for connections between emerging themes, (e) move to the next case, and (f) search for patterns in all cases (Smith et al., 2009):

1. The researcher began the analysis process by listening to the recorded interviews on an individual basis two or more times. Then the recorded information was

made into transcripts, which enabled the researcher to read and reread the transcriptions several times to understand the information. Reading the transcripts more than once allowed the investigator to organize and structure the information in a more logical manner that permitted a more indepth analysis of the data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The researcher also took notes of the interpretations in a reflection journal that also permitted a better understanding of the participants' accounts (Smith et al., 2009).

2. The researcher analyzed the interview transcriptions in a very meticulous manner, which involved a thorough examination of the language and expressions used within the participants accounts. This step also allowed the researcher to become familiar with the transcripts, resulting in a better understanding of the participants' views on the phenomenon, meaning the information became clearer to the investigator as the participants reports were scrutinized (Alase, 2017).

3. Next, the researcher developed and noted the emerging themes from the written data and eliminated those that were not necessary. The themes were at first written as general phrases and later formulated into clear, purposeful statements. Notably, the themes were derived from the participants' accounts and the researcher's interpretations (Smith et al., 2009).

4. The researcher searched for and identified connections between the emerging themes and placed them in order of appearance, meaning the trends that emerged from the data were isolated (Alase, 2017).

5. In this step, the researcher repeated the analytical process with the next participant's story. A comparison of the documents was performed to assist with the formation of the various themes (Alase, 2017). Additionally, the investigator looked for familiar notations to make a connection to the previous transcription.

6. In this step of the data analysis, the researcher searched for codes and patterns across all of the cases, followed by themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Additionally, the investigator reviewed all of the scripts, compared the information from each script, and then documented the findings under the appropriate headings. The researcher then generated a report based on the findings to explain the relationships (Alase, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher sought and obtained approval from the Institutional Review Boards of Nova Southeastern University and the target Bahamian tertiary institution before commencing the research study. Each participant had to read and complete a consent form to participate in the research study. Additionally, all individuals in the sample had to volunteer to be a participant in the study and were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The participants were treated respectfully and ethically, and they were not coerced into participating in the study. For taking part in the research study, after completing the second interview, each participant received a $20 telephone data card voucher as compensation.

The researcher took steps to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. A pseudonym was used for all participants, which meant that they identified using fictitious names so as to protect their identities. During data collection, the researcher remained neutral and allowed the participants to respond to open-ended interview questions without attempting to influence their responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, the researcher was the only individual who was able to access the data materials. The electronic data were housed on a password-protected computer, and the other materials were stored in a locked cabinet within a locked cabinet at the researcher's school office. All research materials were stored in a secured place and would later be destroyed after 3

years; this is inclusive of all the notes, transcripts, and recordings.

Trustworthiness

The researcher established trustworthiness through member checking. Creswell and Poth (2018) asserted that members play a significant role for confirming the accuracy and credibility of a research study. The researcher engaged in member checking for this study after the first and second interviews were completed. The researcher then forwarded the transcribed interviews to all participants for feedback and requested that they review and verify the content for accuracy. They were given 2 weeks to complete this assignment. The researcher answered any questions that the participants had regarding their transcripts. Additionally, to ensure trustworthiness, the researcher had two experts review the interview protocol. This review was to determine the validity and quality of the instrument (Smith et al., 2009). The experts gave recommendations for improving the instrument, and these were implemented by the researcher.

Potential Research Bias

The researcher is a faculty member at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas and holds diplomas in general nursing, midwifery, and community health. In addition, the researcher also has a Bachelor of Science degree in management and a Master of Science degree in nursing education. The researcher has taught at a Bahamian tertiary institution for the past 10 years and is involved with first-year freshman student experiences. The researcher is enjoying the faculty role and always looks forward to interacting with the students.

The researcher became interested in LGBTQ-related matters after a student who attended the tertiary institution at which the researcher was teaching confessed that he was gay. He stated that his confession shocked his family, friends, and associates.

Additionally, he outlined the turmoil he experienced while trying to conceal his true identity. Remarkably, in The Bahamas, LGBTQ individuals are not readily accepted; in fact, they are basically disliked. The researcher had taught students who were suspected of being LGBTQ individuals, but most of the students did not reveal their true identities as they feared discrimination and abuse, whereas some did reveal their true identities.

The researcher decided to study this minority grouping because of a real desire to learn about the students' academic lived experiences. Fundamentally, the researcher believes that people have a right to be whoever they want to be, and the community should accept them as such. The review of the literature was a real game changer for the researcher and has resulted in a more empathetic attitude towards LGBTQ students. A reflective journal was created to assist the researcher to identify and manage any potential bias during the research study that the researcher may have had. Additionally, the analysis and findings of the research study were reviewed by an expert.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This qualitative research study involved an examination of the lived experiences of seven LGBTQ students who were enrolled in a tertiary institution in The Bahamas. The purpose of this study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of those lived experiences by utilizing the IPA format, which identified patterns and themes in the participants' interview transcripts (Smith et al., 2009). The students were in Zoom classes and then later emerged to face-to-face classes at the tertiary institution. In this section, their lived personal experiences are discussed. Based on the data analysis, three significant findings emerged along with five themes. The following research questions were established to guide this applied dissertation:

1. What are the academic, social, and peer interactive experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled in a tertiary education institution in The Bahamas?

2. How do LGBTQ students describe their ease or discomfort with expressing their sexuality identification at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas?

3. What campus support and resources do LGBTQ students utilize at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas?

Participant Summaries

A phenomenological approach was chosen to investigate the lived experiences of LGBTQ students while enrolled in a tertiary institution in The Bahamas (Smith et al., 2009). For the collection of the data, the researcher conducted individual interviews using a face-to-face format. Each participant was interviewed on two separate occasions for a maximum of 60 minutes. The participants included seven students who self-identified as being an LGBTQ individual. The students had all attended the tertiary institution for a

minimum of 2 or more years. The identity of the participants was protected by using pseudonyms.

Amos

Amos was a 24-year-old male who self-identified as being gay. He was from the northern section of The Bahamas and had relocated to attend the tertiary institution in the capital city. He was a fourth-year student who was completing an undergraduate degree in nursing. He considered himself to be a Black Bahamian who was very proud of his accomplishments to date. He disclosed that, in the middle of senior high school, he admitted to a trusted friend that he was gay. The friend told his school peers about his disclosure, and that was the beginning of his torture. His parents disliked that he was gay, and, at first, they were not speaking to him, but their relationship had gotten better.

Bari

Bari was born and raised in the central islands of The Bahamas. He was 21 years old, and he admitted that he had always considered himself as being a gay male. He was in his second year at the Bahamian tertiary institution and was pursuing an undergraduate degree in business and finance. He racially described himself as being a Black Bahamian gay man. He also recalled that he was caught by his relatives clasping and embracing a male, so he decided to tell his family that he was gay and so he did. He further stated that his family's opinion of him was of no consequence, as he really did not care what they thought. His mother said she wanted the "demon" to leave him and continued to telephone call him to pray for him. She had also anointed his head with holy olive oil on several occasions, as they all believed in prayer.

Carisa

Carisa is a female who identified herself as being a lesbian. She was from the

central islands of The Bahamas. She also racially classified herself as being a mixture of Black and Caucasian stock but a Bahamian national nonetheless. She was 20 years old, in her third year at the institution, and was pursuing a degree in law and criminal justice. She recalled that she "came out" on Facebook when she was in the beginning of her junior high school journey. Her school associates and relatives saw the posting and told her parents. Life, as she knew it, changed from that day, and the disrespectful taunts began. Her mother was extremely disappointed in her and only spoke to her on special occasions, such as her birthday, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, and once during holy week.

Don

Don was a 28-year-old bisexual male. He admitted that his relationships were on equal levels with both males and females. He was a business major student who had spent almost 4 years pursuing an undergraduate degree at the institution. He migrated to The Bahamas from Haiti at the age of 10 years and has always pursued and held relationships with both males and females. He racially described himself as being a Black Bahamian who had Haitian origins. He remembered that he actually called his parents to a meeting to inform them that he was not heterosexual and that he loved and had been in relationships with both males and females. His parents were declaring that he would be heterosexual.

Ethan

Ethan was born and raised in the northeast section of The Bahamas. He was 25 years old and admitted that he was a gay male. He had been in the academic institution for about 3 years and was pursuing an undergraduate degree in secondary education. He was a senior student and racially identified himself as being a privileged Black Bahamian

gay man. Ethan stated that he "came out" by sending and posting pictures of himself and his gay friends on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. He even had a picture of his current male associate on his WhatsApp profile picture. He eventually told his family about his sexual preferences, which was to his detriment. They had not spoken to him for a long time, in fact from before the pandemic. He was the recipient of a private scholarship and received a monthly stipend.

Francita

Francita was a 27-year-old student. She identified herself as being a lesbian and was born and raised in Haiti. She was pursuing an undergraduate degree in music and had been at the academic institution for the past 2 years. She racially identified herself as being a Black Haitian Bahamian as she had very strong Haitian roots because her family was directly descended from Haiti. Francis stated that she had yet to come out to her family, but she "came out" to several of her friends at the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020. Francita said her parents were hardworking people, and she had to choose the right time to tell them that she was a lesbian.

George

George was a 30-year-old bisexual male who said, despite being bisexual, he preferred and pursued more male relationships than female. He had been at the tertiary institution for about 3 years and was pursuing an undergraduate degree in information technology. He racially classified himself as being a Black Bahamian man from the northern section of The Bahamas. George stated that he was in a relationship with an older male who in reality coerced and compelled him to come out. He was not ready to admit but felt obliged to do so. Likewise, the male told everyone that they were together in a relationship. Table 1 depicts the participants' demographic information.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	No. years in tertiary institution	Sexual orientation
1	Male	24	4	Gay
2	Male	21	2	Gay
3	Female	20	3	Lesbian
4	Male	28	3	Bisexual
5	Male	25	3	Gay
6	Female	27	2	Lesbian
7	Male	30	4	Bisexual

Significant Findings

After reviewing the transcripts, a better understanding of the research hypotheses was ascertained by the researcher. The participants' answers to the questions were mainly very explicit and offered a clear insight into their experiences. A few of the participants' accounts contained profanity. The researcher meticulously followed the steps of the IPA process and was able to isolate three significant findings that were noteworthy for discussion as they had all impacted the lived experiences of the participants. According to Smith and Osborn (2015), an IPA approach is a good analytical design for use when the topic is "complex, ambiguous, and emotionally laden" (p. 41). In a research study, a significant finding involves results or conclusions that are important and noteworthy of mentioning (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004). The three significant findings discovered in this research were (a) hearing homophobic remarks, (b) undergoing exclusion, and (c) experiencing mental health challenges.

Hearing Homophobic Remarks

The participants indicated that, before and after they came out, they were

subjected to comments and actions that were unflattering, discriminatory, biased, and abusive. The academic environment was a place that was not a refuge for the students, as the abuse was purported even more. The students also recounted Zoom online experiences. Amos mournfully described a notable school experience:

It was the Labor Day holiday and my class decided to have a basketball jamboree on campus. I decided to bring one of my friends to the game. We came dressed in the same-colored clothing, which was green and white tops with beige pants. We started to play the game, and I fell to the ground. My friend rushed to assist me with getting up and touched my back in a caressing manner and brushed my bruised knee.

When the students saw his actions, they became angry and started calling us "faggots," "sissy," "stinking fag," "spawns of Satan," and one student even threw their fried chicken at us. So, we just left, and everyone cheered when we did. The Zoom class was awful too. One time, the teacher was talking to me, and I was slow to answer, so one student shouted, "She mean f-ing you, fag. Another student wrote "answer fucker."

Carisa also shared a very powerful experience:

I had a male student who told me that I was a stupid dumb child of the devil and Jezebel (Biblical figure). He also said that I was just too pretty to be a pussy lovin bandit. The male student suddenly reaches over and feel my breast and then bit me on my neck. When I attempted to push him away, he kissed me on the lips. I fell on my knees, and he kept repeating, "Now you know how it feels to be handled by a real man who has a real penis." He then run away. This cause me to stop eating.

I hated the Zoom classes. I tried to keep my video off, but the teacher always made me turn it on. People send me stink messages about my clothing. One girl, say, 'You are a girl, why you does dress like that?' I was just so tired of their carrying on. I just ignored them. Stupidity is a serious thing.

Bari described his experience as follows:

Yeah students called me all sorts of name, but I did not give a shit. They called me faggot, bungee bandit, queer, and even fairy. I would turn around laugh and tell them, "It takes one to know one" and then flip the bird. In Zoom class, a few students private message and called me "asshole," I ignored a few, but I sent messages back like "stink cunny, dirty dick."

Undergoing Exclusion

The participants also stated that they had problems with and were excluded from many campus events. If they attended any functions, they were made to feel very uncomfortable, and individuals usually stared at and would talk about them. The students stated that usually they did not attend any on-campus or off-campus functions. They iterated that it was even more difficult to make real friendships with the heterosexual students, as they did not want to be bothered. This finding was best illustrated by Ethan:

I was excited to just be attending a university; boy I was so happy, and I said that I would join a few on-campus clubs. When I went to a first club meeting, everyone appeared to be welcoming and the atmosphere was good. Then it came time for the girls and boys to be paired in same together. I was placed in a male group, and a male student said that I should go to the female group as I was a girl. Really! I said I was a man, but everyone found my statement funny and laughed. One male student even started whistling at me. I left. Listen to me, man, I tell you

in one of my classes they (the students) made a WhatsApp group so that the teacher could communicate with us and did not even add my number, I did not even ask why (suck teeth). Bunch of cut throats.

Experiencing Mental Health Challenges

The participants admitted that they had problems with their mental health, as their peers were a major contributor to their ill health. The participants experienced, for example, mood swings, anxiety, suicide ideation, and anorexia among others. This final significant finding was profoundly explained by George:

I was always attracted to older men, actually men who were between 10 and 30 years my senior, and I used to go with a man at the institution and another dude saw us kissing and told everyone about us. After that there was all kind of insults, jeers, and even students openly cussing me out. I was just fed up. It felt like the whole world was against me. I attempted to jump from a window of a four-story building, but my relatives came in as I was breaking the glass and held onto me. There were five of them, they shouted and told me not to do it. It was stupid to kill yourself over foolishness. My younger brother told me how much he respected and loved me. I was later admitted to and spent 3 weeks in a mental health facility having all kinds of stupid therapy.

Bari shared the following:

I did not experience any and I say any issues with my mental health, in fact I may have thought about killing others but never myself. I love me. I think students who thought I would be insulted were rather disappointed, they felt bad, not me.

Table 2 displays the grading of the significant findings that were attributed to the participants.

Table 2

Grading of the Significant Findings Related to the Participants

Finding	Amos	Bari	Carisa	Don	Ethan	Francita	George
Homophobic remarks	3	1	2	2	3	1	3
Exclusion	2	0	1	2	3	1	3
Mental health challenges	2	1	3	2	3	1	3

Note. On a scale of 0 to 3, the numbers denote the severity of the significant findings. 0 = *None*. 1 = *Slight*. 2 = *Moderate*. 3 = *Severe*.

Themes

From the data analysis, the researcher identified five themes that arose from the transcribed research document. Each of the themes represent the participants' lived experiences. The themes that were discovered are as follows: (a) LGBTQ student awareness and visibility, (b) learning to cope with the challenges, (c) improving the campus climate and safety, (d) need for more supportive faculty and staff, and (e) LGBTQ student resources and support. In this section, the themes are discussed, together with direct quotes from each of the participants.

Theme 1: LGBTQ Student Awareness and Visibility

This theme answered Research Question 1: What are the academic, social, and peer interactive experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled in a tertiary education institution in The Bahamas? The participants felt that LGBTQ awareness was lacking in the institution and that many students and faculty members were not concerned, nor did they particularly want LGBTQ students on the campus. They also stated that there was a large contingent of LGBTQ students on campus, but they were afraid to come out and

would rather remain in the closet. The participants felt that if their campus had more information on LGBTQ, then the students would be more knowledgeable about and accepting to them. Notably, the school's curriculum should contain LGBTQ content. This does not mean teaching sex education or mainly relaying stories about LGBTQ individuals. This also means being encouraging and having respectful plus meaningful conversations that would promote a more inclusive environment for all students regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. This strategy would also, in turn, reduce the occurrence of bullying and discrimination.

Amos revealed that he has shed many tears about his life. He has endured a lot of hardships and really wants the LGBTQ students to be recognized, as many of them are in hiding and are very reluctant to come out. Furthermore, Amos stated the following:

I have always known that not all people who people think are smart are not really so. LGBTQ awareness must start with the people who are in charge of the place. They are the ones who should be calling for information about LGBTQ to be written in all courses. There need to be more and more discussions about important matters like gay rights and topics. Man, people can talk about how everyone need to be respected despite what you may be going through.

Bari recalled that he has been a gay individual from his birth and is not really concerned about others' opinions of him. He agreed that the academic institution needs to be aware that LGBTQ students are there and shared this sentiment:

The Bahamas is a very religious place and all of us, even me, say we are Christians. We are supposed to be our brothers' keepers, but we don't do that. Listen, we are all one and the same, just that some people or men like women, and some men like men. So what? Students know about gay people; they just don't

know how to behave themselves. I think that there should be signs all around the school to tell students that all different type of students attends here not just you.

  I've had enough of these "extra smart" (fingers quotations sign) students acting like they don't know people does be gay too. They need to teach gay facts here every day, around the clock. Post gay signs on the wall and tell these students about gay. Yeah some of these students say they have no problem with gay people but that is a lie. We are human too. It would be really funny if they started teaching lessons about gays. Boy, that would be the day hell freeze.

Carisa said how disappointed she was as that there was no mention of anything as it pertained to LGBTQ around the campus. Expanding on this statement, she gave this account:

> You know I come to school dress in my clothes, I does buy my own clothing as these are the clothes that I have to wear. The clothing are men clothes, well dah. Students always have the audacity to ask me why I does be wearing men clothes as I am a woman. Can you believe this? Well dah, I wear my (points to herself) clothes every day and every day some nut or nuts will ask me about them. They even talk about my shoes, which are real men leather shoes, well dah. They need to be educated on lesbians, and I think it has to be in their classes.
>
>   Students keep fooling with me, so I know and feel they just don't understand me and what I stand for. These students keep getting on my nerve not only are they talking about me and don't know me they are talking about my clothes, and the way I does also even eat, well dah. Stupid fools! There need to be LGBTQ work in the classes, and teachers need to teach the students about this type of thing. It can't be in a big place like these students are asking silly

questions about my dressing. A lot of lesbians scared to come out because of these fools around here.

Don shared a similar story:

People around here don't understand me, and I don't understand them. They spread my name all across this campus. When I go out with a girl the boys call me names and when I go out with the boys the girls call me even worst names. I wear clothing depending on my mood. I fix my eyebrows and wear short magnetic lashes, so what? These students are dumb and dangerous. They been calling me a punk from my freshman year.

They also called me a demon because I am bisexual. I just like men and women. These students around here just don't understand that. They need seminars and cultural shows to help them to understand what being gay is all about. No, I seriously don't think they know anything. They are very scary with their bad attitude and dumbness.

Ethan admitted that there is a serious need for LGBTQ awareness in the institution. He said, "My soft squeaky voice always causes people to take a second look at me, so I hardly ever speak. I am a part-time body builder, so my physique is always attracting both women and men." He said that women hate him when they find out he is gay. He remembers being slapped by a female freshman student athlete when she found out he was gay, which he seriously tries to hide. He also realized that information on LGBTQ at the academic institution was seriously nonexistent. He suggested that the students be given all kinds of books and creative textbooks and stated, "These students should be given books, like the Marvel comics books so that they can learn about LGBTQ, especially about their likes and dislikes."

Francita also observed that the academic institution is really lacking LGBTQ awareness. She has never heard the word *pride* mentioned in the institution. Even the rainbow colors cannot be seen anywhere. She wears a purple piece of clothing on a daily basis, and students have yet to recognize that it is one of the pride colors for lesbians. She sits quietly in her classes, and students for the most part ignore her. She stated the following:

> This place can have days that they can dedicate to introduce students to LGBTQ, especially highlighting the lesbians, as there are more females attending academic institutions than men. This matter is really serious and has to be dealt with proper and quick."

George shared the following:

> The school administrators around here must be aware and acknowledge all of the different types of identities they have here on campus. The campus should be LGBTQ friendly, but it is not. People, especially the students, are not respectful of other people who are not like them and to tell you the truth this has to stop. LGBTQ awareness has to be created, planned, and instituted; the students have to be taught about us and what we stand for.
>
> I have taken so much insults from people because I am gay. Classes must be taught on LGBTQ there is just no getting around it. Being gay is real. This place has to accept and listen to all students voices and help them to shine. They have to come up with the plans on how they are going to assist the students and they have plenty of money so they can do whatever they want. I don't need to tell them what to do they should know what to do. The teachers and the students around here need help.

Theme 2: Learning to Cope With the Challenges

This theme answered Research Question 3: What campus support and resources do LGBTQ students utilize at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas? The participants felt that they were doing a good job at hiding their true feelings and moving forward every semester. They said that they take on a bold attitude and try to defend themselves from the discrimination and abuse on a daily basis. Amos explained, "I just ignore and keep ignoring these students when they come at me to insult me. I don't let them see how I truly feel." Bari gave this contribution:

I have always been one to speak my mind and I resolved a long time ago not to let anyone fool with or say anything to me I don't like. I will tell them where to go. If they come to fight me I will fight back. I made up my mind to give what I get. I does feel bad at times but for the most part I trying to deal with it.

Carisa shared the following:

I working on it. This pandemic made everything worst. I used to be soft, and I still am, but I trying to speak up for myself. I think anyone would feel bad if they are constantly being molested with every day. This ain't making no sense. They need to behave, they lucky COVID ain't kill them.

Don offered the following comment:

I wear magnetic lashes and put on a different style every day. I feel really good when I do this, and when students call me "fag," I would blink my eyes at them. I don't believe in fighting. I meditate a lot and have the occasional drinks (he laughs). I had to after coming here. COVID even ain't change these nasty people around here. They get worser. Fools.

Ethan also shared that the thought of going to Canada or Florida really motivates

him. He stated that he would travel to China if he had to. Likewise, Francita did not have a lot to share as she said wearing the color purple gave her strength to cope with the "problems" at her school. She does not see the students and they do not see her. She is at peace with this, and she stated the following:

> I go to the library every day to read; students stare at me, but I don't look up. I dye my hair purple and when I go to the library people just look. I like the library; students are sort of quiet there. I don't bother them. I go in a corner at the back of the room until my next class.

George explained as follows:

> I have a few good friends; the campus police, a few teachers and even my coworkers. I drink a few beers and things like that. They all does help me but my only problem is these older dudes who like me. You know what I mean? These people around her ain't making no sense.

Theme 3: Assessment of the Campus Climate and Safety

This theme answered Research Question 2: How do LGBTQ students describe their ease or discomfort with expressing their sexuality identification at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas? The participants all described the campus climate as being good and bad. They said that there were moments when they felt all right, but, for the most part, it was troublesome. The majority of the campus community hardly ever spoke to them and never really befriended them, while a lot were downright rude. There were a few exceptions. As far as safety was a concern, they all felt unsafe. They experienced sexual assaults and arguments, where students would curse at them arbitrarily, make physical assaults, and even steal their personal items. A majority of the participants attended afternoon classes, and they outlined that there was poor lighting, minimal

students on campus, and few security personnel. Amos gave another example:

> For the most part, I enroll in early morning classes and believe me, there were always some ragamuffins walking on this campus looking for something to thief or someone to molest. Listen to me, I had to make pepper spray with bleach, black pepper, hot pepper sauce, and vinegar to protect myself around here. I carried a spray bottle of that around with me every day.
>
> One time a group of students came and to my face and called me "soft" and wanted to start a fight with me. I told them I wasn't on their run and tried to run away to the security booth; they followed me, but I was always a fast runner. This campus is not a safe place, it has to be changed. This place and the people who come here are all silly. I can't wait to leave. People does bother with you for no reason. As far as the Zoom classes are concerned, I never really attended.

Bari described this experience:

> I don't like this school environment at all. People here are always running out. I am sick and tired of them. I always take late classes cause, I have to work in the day. When you see any time after 8pm, this campus does be empty. I had about three people try to attack me when I was coming from class. One time, a girl and her friends came at me, man I rest my bags down and tell them to come-on. They just curse at me and of course I cuss them too.
>
> I heard many stories of students being rape, molested, and beaten up on campus, and this nonsense has to stop. These students even thief my bag. One time I left my bag in the classroom and went to use the bathroom, when I came back my bag and laptop was missing. A student had thief my things. This time I cried, I can't afford to buy those kinda things. All kinda signs need to be put up to

tell people how to respect other people and their property. Some days are good and others not so good, and some days are bad. When I walk pass some of these bitches they start talking about or laughing at me, but I don't care. I just walk pass. Students even send me rude and nasty emails. I does suck my teeth a lot. I have to endure this, I soon leave this place.

Carisa gave this description:

This campus is not safe. I don't know why, but it seems like men are attracted to me to and I am tired of these jokers bothering me. One guy even asked me for a date and then told me that I would have to change my clothes, put on a dress and when I said no, he laughed at me. This campus is sickening, these students are all about themselves. I have had male students trying to come on to me for no reason.

One of my friends got slapped one night coming from class. The man tried to hold her hand and when she pulled it back, the man slapped her in the face and run away. She reported the incident to the campus police but has not heard anything from the report and that has been several months ago. Man, this place is so close minded when it comes to lesbian students or anything what is different. They think only them is people. They have to be better than that, well dah. They need to get with it. My clothing does freak people out and they stay talking trash about me.

Don shared very similar experiences:

On campus is hell, and the people there are extremely mean. One thing I notice is that students like to be right up in people business. They don't have any respect for themselves or anybody else. I am bisexual but the students still call me sissy. There is a difference. I feel that they should mind their own business. I know for a

fact that there are many students on campus that are afraid to come out and it is

because of these bad attitudes of these self-righteous students and staff members.

The place around here is toxic and I for one don't like it. I am always

careful what I say and how I act around here, as people can take it, and twist it

(Kisses teeth). On this campus only straight people exist, and I mean no other

people does. I don't like this campus at all. The security people are actually non-

existent, they are helpless and are not around when you need them.

Ethan said that he "can feel all kind of negative vibes from this deadly place." For

instance, he stated the following:

> I have friends that are still in the closet, and they are always complaining of the
>
> way people are treating them and these people only suspect that my friends are
>
> gay. The area around here is really awful and not good for people in general
>
> especially for those who are different from the 'elites' around here. I have to put
>
> up with their shit every day. Believe me, when I get my degree, I will move away
>
> from this hole; I'm going to Florida or Canada.

On this matter, Francita had the least to say. She mentioned that she noticed a

blow hot, blow cold campus environment but she just chose to ignore it as most people,

just ignore her. She said, "People don't really see me, they don't like me, I hang my head

down and no one really bothers with me, people just pass me straight." George said that

he has known about the poor school environment from since he entered the establishment

as a freshman a few years back. He explained as follows:

> Around here, friendship is a serious issue; everyone does be against everyone. It
>
> is every man for himself. People hate gays and disabled people, but gays the most.
>
> I saw students walking on a disabled ramp, and the person in the wheelchair was

left at the bottom of their ramp. For the most part, these students around here

won't be seen talking to or trying to be my friend. They see me as another lost gay

man. That is gay is a no no around here. Man, people hate me for no reason.

I work in the school gym and students does try to diss me there. When

they see me there, it looks like it is a very serious problem. Girls does mean to

shake their bottom at me and try to whine up on me. I does leave them alone. They

does be on something and I don't care to know what it is. I get beat up just about

every day   from some of these girls around here. But I still feel more respected

here at the gym than in my classroom or on the main campus.   As far as safety is

concern many male students does try to rave or fight with me, so they can beat you

up for being gay. I know, because plenty have tried with me, and I have gotten

plenty punches, slaps and even kicks.

I like the campus police, I think they are doing a good job. I have serval

complaints against students on their record. One time a male student actually tried

to hit me with a club, but he was stopped by several of the gym staff. I made a

complaint against him. One girl even pulled my mask off and popped my chain. I

reported her. I have gotten in many fights because of these people, but I right here.

Theme 4: Need for More Supportive Faculty and Staff

This theme answered Research Question 3: What campus support and resources

do LGBTQ students utilize at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas? The participants

revealed that, for an LGBTQ student, having the backing of faculty and staff is very

important because the academic life is a critical point in their lives. The participants

revealed that, while the faculty and staff were not really offensive to them, they did little

to assist them. They stated that the institution had over 200 faculty members, but fewer

than 20 members were really supportive. All of the participants revealed that they had major challenges with the faculty and staff. For instance, Amos communicated the following:

> I felt that the faculty and staff at my college have my back. I thought they cared about me. In my first year at the institution, I was one of five students giving and oral presentation and I was dressed in all my pride colors. The teacher told the students to look at how well dressed I was, and I felt so good. The teacher spoke to me in a manner that was not offensive. I became very close with one of the male supposedly gay teachers and he was a great support, we developed a very close relationship.
>
> But not all of the teachers around here are good. I remember one teacher when I forgot to complete several assignments because of what I was going through, telling me that if I would stop 'sissying around', I would be able to get my work done. I started crying out loudly. I was later told that other teachers fussed the teacher out about his stinking towards me.

Bari discussed with the researcher this experience:

> I must say that all of my professors hated me and hardly ever spoke to me. I felt that they always talk down, around and up on top of me, but seriously I did not care. My grades were always sort of low but at least I ain't fail nothing. Man, one white teacher became angry with me one class day and called me a sissy and used the N word. I asked him if he was talking to me, and he said yes, faggot. Well listen here, the students tried to calm me down, but I told the teacher where to jump from and how high. Someone called the security, and I was escorted from the class. I was later put into another class, but the woman teacher had sneaky

mean actions, she never fool with me. I think she knew better. Listen to me, these

people do not know what the word support means. They can kiss what I sit on.

Carisa also responded as follows:

> My clothes was always a problem, it seems that my dressing does make people
>
> mad or jealous and I really ain't on their run. One teacher asked me in the class
>
> why I am dress like the way I am. I was embarrassed as everyone turned to look at
>
> me. I have spent the last four and a half years in mind therapy sessions learning
>
> how to deal with these crazy people, but it still makes me feel bad. Some of the
>
> students laughed at me. I just left. People can give but they can't take.

Some of the participants felt that the faculty and staff just had bad attitudes that is

they spoke to them in a condescending manner. For example, Don explained one of his

many encounters:

> I was preparing for a speech for a class seminar, and had forgotten my notes in
>
> my room. My group was actually the last one to present, and I had a group ahead
>
> of me. I went to the teacher and told her I had forgotten my notes. You know what
>
> she said to me? "Wow you are always the clever one." I was upset, and she could
>
> see it on my face. This woman always made snide remarks. I left, and she gave
>
> me a zero for my part. Of course, I failed the class. I felt that she made sure I did.
>
> Ass! One teacher even told me that I was a very confused Haitian. She had never
>
> met a gay confused Haitian before. Sometimes school does be too much. The
>
> pandemic was bad enough. These people already forget about COVID.

Ethan said that, for the most part, the faculty and staff from his college left him

alone. A lot of the faculty members knew him for what he was. He noticed in class that

his teachers ignored him and only asked him questions when other students did not know

the answer or they deliberately gave him difficult questions to answer. He shared that

some of the faculty were cordial while others were indifferent. He stated the following:

> On one time, a female student called me gay, and the teacher just laughed, and, on
>
> another occasion, I was bending over, picking up a pen from the floor, and a
>
> female teacher literally slapped me on my hip. I felt so insulted. I went home and
>
> bathed with bleach.

Francita shared these sentiments:

> Faculty members are always telling me that because I am very quiet they tend to
>
> overlook me. They don't even remember that I am a part of their class. I am
>
> always asked what class I am in and when I say "yours," the teachers are always
>
> shocked. They always say that they have never seen me before. I does feel like
>
> they does mean to be rude to me. They does act like I ain't there, no place around.
>
> They have made jokes about gay and lesbians students in my class but for most
>
> part the faculty members are ok towards me. The semester just before the
>
> pandemic a male teacher said in class that all gay women have problems with
>
> their self-esteem, and he was looking right at me. I just put a blank look on my
>
> face and cuss him in my head.

George gave this explanation:

> I was always picked on in class. The teacher love to ask me questions or make
>
> comments that I would be forced to respond to so that they can laugh at my
>
> squeaky voice. Some of the faculty are good and some are just mean. I went to my
>
> advisor one day, I had a question about the class scheduling, and during our talk
>
> she said that she just did not know how to handle me. She was actually afraid to
>
> deal with me. I was surprised. By being a middle-aged, older woman, I expected

her to know how to deal with people that is all people. I can see that there is a need for these teachers to get help. When a teacher opens up and tells you she don't know how to talk to you because you are gay, man that is very serious. They worsa than COVID.

Theme 5: LGBTQ Student Resources and Support

This theme answered Research Question 1: What are the academic, social, and peer interactive experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled in a tertiary education institution in The Bahamas? The participants all said that there are no established or makeshift resource or support groups for them on campus. They feel that there is a critical need for this, as students need help when they encounter incidents with which they are unable to deal. There have been a few teachers who are sympathetic or empathetic to their course and have tried to advise them, but their counsel is not always readily available. Amos gave this contribution:

I have heard that there was a campus group or LGBTQ student here a few years back but because of the negative attitudes of the students they had to abandon it. I have been here for a long time and have never heard any of the faculty members or students mentioned anything about LGBTQ don't exist. Listen, people don't respect gay and lesbians. There are no clubs or afternoon activity that we can join. This is bad.

We need to come together so that we can support each other. We can help one another, instead of just hiding from these maniacs. There should be a day set aside at this institution to just celebrate LGBTQ but (he holds his hands up). I would hang out with a few of my friends on the weekend or when I am off but that is all. There is nothing on campus for us to attend. Even the annual once a

year meet and greet is not inviting to me.

Bari basically said the same:

> There are no on-campus activities to go to. I have a few teachers that I does talk to every now and again but that is it. I was thinking that we need a "hot line" if we have problems we can call someone for advice. Me and my friends does celebrate Pride Day among ourselves but I think this place should recognize it and have activities to mark the day. Pride Day comes once a year and that's the least they can do around here. I have people I does hang out with.
>
> I don't hang out with anyone from around here. These people trapsy, I think they are gay, and they just might be straight pretending to be gay to get at me. That will be a dangerous day. I ain't on their run. I don't know what to do. I think this is a mission for the teachers, this is their jobs to help the students. They need to call a meeting and get the ball rolling.

Carisa shared the following:

> The people in charge here should make a group center for us. They have so many vacant offices around here they can give us at least one. We can have meetings so that we can know one another and what goes on. I started a DJ business and was looking around for people to help me. People are just scared around here. They are scared to admit who they are. So, if we had an office people can come in and talk. When people talk about my clothes too much, I went to the counseling department, and they didn't help me. I don't do the counseling thing too much. They seem nosey to me. I wear my mask every day. It does hide how I feel.

Don stated the following:

> I have been trying to identify other gay students, but they don't really want to be

seen. I hang out with my friends outside of the campus and everything does be ok.

I teach a private makeup and hair braiding class in the night at my friend's house

but so far only two gay men are attending, they are not in the college. I seriously

wish that I could help. I don't mind joining a club. I used to know a teacher that I

could have asked but he is no longer here. Wow! This is a serious problem. I went

to the counsellors, but I don't think they help me, they just made me more angry.

We need to talk about our problems and not keep them bottled up inside.

Ethan offered the following comment:

I know we need people and places on campus to help us, but it does not exist. I

had to go to several private counselling sessions as these people on campus put

me through a lot of hell and damnation. I don't trust the counsellors we have on

around here, they just want to be in your business.

Ethan also felt that LGBTQ students are being short changed in that they do not have any

resources such as clubs on campus for the LGBTQ community. He stated the following:

A teacher from this school has to begin the process and start. They can begin by

looking for safe spaces where a counselor can be posted just to hear our issues on

a daily basis. We have very serious problems. As every day there is something

going on with me. I had to seek help from the gym crew, private doctors and even

the campus priest.

Francita shared the following:

I have been to the counseling department several times; they does help me, but I

don't really see the need to go there all of the time. I feel that gay people or

students who are thinking about suicide should have a place to vent and tell all

their story. So, we need an office space on campus. So, they can get help quickly.

The school need to have events where we can talk about our problems, they need

to start calling weekly student meeting and address student issues properly. I just

don't know what to say but I know we all have very serious issues that need to be

addressed, not soon but now.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the participants' backgrounds and gave

details of their coming out, familial experiences, and tertiary institution encounters. The

results of the participants' accounts were formulated into five major themes that

encapsulated their lived experiences. The themes delineated the challenges and issues that

they faced in the academic environment and how they supposedly coped with their trials.

The themes were as follows: (a) LGBTQ student awareness and visibility, (b) learning to

cope with the challenges, (c) improving the campus climate and safety, (d) need for more

supportive faculty and staff, and (e) LGBTQ student resources and support. These themes

directly impacted the lives of the participants. Overall, the participants expressed feelings

of anxiety and hopelessness as it related to the future of LGBTQ students' concerns in the

tertiary academic setting.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter, the findings described in Chapter 4 of this research study are explained and compared to the scholarly literature. The purpose of the study was to examine the lived experiences of LGBTQ students who were enrolled in a tertiary institution in The Bahamas. Past and current research studies have documented that LGBTQ students usually encounter very troublesome times in the academic arena that include, but are not limited to, physical, social, educational, and mental health challenges (Stout &Wright, 2016; Taylor, 2015).

At first, the researcher used the purposeful sampling method, which resulted in one participant being recruited. A purposeful sampling involved the researcher seeking participants who identified as being LGBTQ (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Then a snowball method was used, where six other participants were recruited. The snowball method allowed a participant to refer a friend (Etikan et al., 2015). The IPA approach was used to analyze the data, where three significant findings were isolated:

1. Hearing homophobic remarks. In this finding, the participants often spoke of being called unsavory names, such as sissy, faggot, and fairy.

2. Undergoing exclusion. The participants were excluded from many campus activities. For example, they were not able to have real friendships.

3. Experiencing mental health challenges. The participants had complaints related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as experiencing suicidal ideation, anorexia, and anxiety. The abovementioned was also mentioned by Moran et al. (2018) in a research study, which found that students experienced mental health issues such as suicide, anxiety and depression, rejection, and isolation.

Summary of Findings

In this section, the researcher used the research questions to summarize the research study's findings. This study was based on three research questions, and the researcher was able to isolate five distinct themes: (a) LGBTQ student awareness and visibility, (b) learning to cope with the challenges, (c) improving the campus climate and safety, (d) need for more supportive faculty and staff, and (e) LGBTQ student resources and support. These themes emphasized the characteristics that were related to the research questions:

1. What are the academic, social, and peer interactive experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled in a tertiary education institution in The Bahamas?

How do LGBTQ students describe their ease or discomfort with expressing their sexuality identification at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas?

3. What campus support and resources do LGBTQ students utilize at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas?

Research Question 1

What are the academic, social, and peer interactive experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled in a tertiary education institution in The Bahamas? This question was answered by Theme 1 (LGBTQ student awareness and visibility) and Theme 5 (LGBTQ student resources and support). The participants all gave various scenarios to answer this question, and the findings revealed that, for the most part, the accounts were very negative. The participants voiced that they did not feel respected or accepted at their institution and may even be "invisible," as one student said. Regarding the following areas, it was found that the participants faced many insurmountable obstacles. The aforementioned findings were discovered by many researchers such as Bardhoshi et al.

(2018), Carter (2013), and Cech and Rothwell (2018). The first research question included three distinct areas that were critical to the participants' lived experiences: academic, social, and peers.

Academic. This aspect of the question entailed the participants' perceptions and experiences about the teaching and learning process. The participants iterated that, in the classroom setting, they were ignored or given questions to answer that the faculty member knew they were unable to and also were spoken to in a condescending manner. One student felt that the teacher deliberately failed them. According to Reisner et al. (2020), academic personnel attitudes towards LGBTQ students must be more caring and accepting.

Social. This area looked at the support the students obtained from the tertiary institution community, specifically in terms of community involvement. The participants divulged that they were not invited to and very seldom attended any on-campus events, and, if they attended an event, they were made very uncomfortable and would eventually leave. A study by Higa et al. (2014) found that LGBTQ students in the academic setting are either verbally or physically abused.

Peers. Specific details were elicited in regard to the support the participants obtained from their colleagues and the campus community. The participants revealed that their peers called them unsavory names and confronted them both physically and socially in a negative, boisterous manner. This finding is also consistent with those of Carter (2013), in which gay students told of being treated unfairly and were called rude names.

Additionally, the findings for the first research question revealed that the LGBTQ participants experienced varied homophobia attitudes from many sectors within the institution, mainly in the academic, social, and peer spheres. This finding is also

consistent with LGBTQ documentation within the scholarly literature. According to

Fedewa and Ahn (2011), once an individual, particularly a school student, identifies as

being LGBTQ, they often experience bullying and victimization, which is habitually in

the form of verbal and physical assaults. Furthermore, the school climate has gained

notoriety for its bullying environment. Similarly, a research study conducted by Garvey

et al. (2015) demonstrated that LGBTQ students experience a wide variety of negative

incidences in the academic setting. Moreover, the atmosphere in the classroom usually

dictates the school climate environment.

Renn (2010) also communicated on the hostility of the campus climate and called

for more positive inclusive actions from the school administrators. The researcher noted

that a hostile academic climate has a negative impact on student learning, which may

result in absenteeism, withdrawal, and poor grades. This finding was also addressed by

Baams et al. (2017), who revealed that an inclusive sexuality education can positively

reduce the incidence of LGBTQ harassment and particularly promote a safer, affirmative

school environment.

Research Question 2

How do LGBTQ students describe their ease or discomfort with expressing their

sexuality identification at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas? This question was

answered by Theme 3 (improving the campus climate and safety). The participants all

said empathetically that, in the academic setting, they were very uncomfortable telling

others about their sexuality as many persons openly condemned them. The literature

supports this finding and confirms that the academic climate is usually very hostile and

unwelcoming to the students (Rankin et al., 2013). The participants also iterated that

many persons told them about the Bible and the Word of God, which people said was

against same-sex relationships. One of the participants said that they did not mention their LGBTQ status to others because most of the academic personnel professed to be Christians and frowned on or belittled any relationships that were not heterosexual. This finding is also consistent with the story told by Kate Fagan of her mental anguish as an LGBTQ individual and playing basketball with Christian team members because she wanted to come out but was afraid of offending her team members (Blais, 2016).

Additionally, the participants were always told that The Bahamas was a Christian nation and "didn't accept sissys or fags." The findings here are supported by the research study of Nkosi and Masson (2017), where the researchers revealed that university Christian LGBTQ students discovered that the church only accepted heterosexual relationships and denounced LGBTQ ones. Besides, many people would deliberately quote scripture to boldly discriminate against the LGBTQ students. This finding was also discovered by Schecker (2022), who penned that a few Christian academic institutions in the United States were asking LGBTQ students to not register to attend their schools, and, if they did in fact register, they would be asked to leave the schools. The Christian schools have in fact denounced relationships that are not heterosexual and have labeled them as sinful (Schecker, 2022).

The participants said that they dressed in the manner of the ascribed gender with which they identified themselves as, and people on their campus were bothered by it. They were always being told that they were operating against the will of God and that they should repent. One student told how she dressed in purple every day to celebrate her lesbianism but was ignored. Rankin et al. (2010) found that, despite higher education strategies to improve attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals, issues of victimization, discrimination, and abuse occur in wide-ranging forms.

The participants also explained that the campus climate was a serious problem for them. They disclosed that they had items stolen from them. In fact, students deliberately stole their personal items, sent them rude emails, and would challenge them to fights for unknown reasons, which resulted in the students becoming despondent. These actions are corroborated by the findings of Kosciw at al. (2013), who found that negative school environments contributed significantly to adverse physical and mental health. Supporting this finding was Bardhoshi et al. (2018), who noted that many LGBTQ students feel unsafe and are negatively impacted by homophobic behavior, which included both physical and online bullying that made the participants feel devalued. This finding was also noted by Holland et al. (2013), who looked at the attitudes of community members towards LGBTQ students in a research study.

Research Question 3

What campus support and resources do LGBTQ students utilize at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas? This research question was answered by Theme 2 (learning to cope with the challenges) and Theme 4 (need for more supportive faculty and staff). All of the participants said that there was no campus resource for them to utilize, and this was a major area of concern for them. They recognized that a physical LGBTQ resource on campus would be better for their health and well-being. The participants also perceived that the institutions did not regard them in a positive manner, nor did they advocate for them to have supportive systems. The participants said that they did not feel safe on campus as they are always looking "over their shoulders." They also reiterated that they felt insecure, bombarded, and could not get the help that they so desperately needed. This finding was supported by Kosciw et al. (2017), who, in a national survey, found that many academic institutions did not have any resources or safe zones for

LGBTQ students.

The undertones of this finding were also in unison with that found by Day et al. (2016), where the researchers proclaimed that having a supportive environment contributes greatly to better coping skills and high levels of physical and mental health. Moreover, the LGBTQ students will feel a connection to the institution and people around the institution. Notably, another research study (Block et al., 2014) showed that strong support, diversity, and a welcoming environment can help individuals to learn more about each other, thus increasing workplace inclusion and acceptance. Notably, this finding was also discovered by Stufft (2011), who, in a research study, made a salient call for teachers in the academic setting to examine their own "prejudices and misconceptions" (p. 10), as this is the first step in the elimination of their personal biases and eventual acceptance of the LGBTQ individuals. Furthermore, the teachers' attitudes will affect the classroom environment.

Context and Interpretation of Findings

Evidence from the research study has pointed out that LGBTQ students in a tertiary institution in The Bahamas have real challenges that must be properly addressed by all the stakeholders involved in the academic institution. The research findings revealed that there was a lack of LGBTQ awareness, as the students were not respected and were ignored on campus. It was apparent that only heteronormative lifestyles are accepted. This means that only individuals who are attracted to the opposite sex are accepted as valid. The hearing of homophobic remarks contributed to the students' anxiety, along with other physical and mental health concerns. This finding was previously addressed by Baams et al. (2017), who revealed that an inclusive sexuality education can positively reduce the incidence of LGBTQ name calling and, in addition,

promote a safer, affirmative school environment.

The findings also disclosed that the faculty and staff were not as supportive of the LGBTQ students as they should be. The participants identified only a small number of the faculty and staff members as being "helpful at times." Interestingly, one unusual finding uncovered in this research was the attitude of a few of the participants. They were for the most part shy and somewhat withdrawn, but there were a few that were ready to give what they got. This meant, for example, if students wanted to fight, then "it was on." When students called the few participants rude names, they, in turn, would call the students names, would flip the bird, and would curse at them too. This act was also mentioned by Tetreault et al. (2013), who, in a study, found that LGBTQ students who displayed a more assertive attitude experienced a more tolerable, productive, and inclusive academic environment.

The research findings also revealed that there were no on-campus resources available to the LGBTQ students. The participants requested that the aforementioned issues be swiftly and properly addressed, as there are many more LGBTQ students who are afraid to come out because they are fearful of discrimination. The LGBTQ students are discriminated and sidelined in the Bahamian academic setting. The literature has demonstrated that there is a need for the creation of LGBTQ safe and welcoming school environments that are safe and free from offensive standards and practices (Garvey et al., 2015).

Implications of Findings

The findings of this research study have showcased the challenges and issues that LGBTQ students encountered while enrolled in a tertiary institution in The Bahamas. Their elicited lived experiences were analyzed, and all narrations revealed that

discrimination and prejudice exist in the institution. This is impactful, as based on the researcher's, knowledge there has never been any research study such as this to ever be undertaken in the mentioned Bahamian tertiary institution.

The findings of this study can inform the academic community of the daily challenges and issues faced by LGBTQ students who are enrolled in a tertiary institution in The Bahamas. They will be able to understand what is happening to the students and create interventions to readily assist them. One example is the creation and establishment of policies, laws, and rules to generate institutional awareness that LGBTQ students do exist and are part of the academic environment. There can also be training sessions to assist academic personnel in their interactions with LGBTQ students. The campus should have designated safe zones and resources so that the students know where to go to access the help that they require. The LGBTQ students should be able to identify when they need help and to know their support system. Another implication from this study is a need for the creation and implementation of strict penalties for offenders who are caught in breach of the policies, laws, and rules. They have to know and conceptualize that there are consequences when their behavior toward another individual is antisocial.

Limitations of the Study

This study filled the gap in the literature by examining the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at a tertiary institution in The Bahamas. Two distinct limitations of this study were observed. The first involved the size of the sample. The researcher initially sought to recruit between 10 and 15 research participants but was only able to obtain seven. At first, the researcher engaged in a purposeful sampling method, which resulted in only one participant being recruited. The recruitment phase was scheduled to last only 2 weeks but had to be extended for a longer period. The researcher then engaged in a

snowball recruitment process and asked individuals who knew LGBTQ students to invite them to be part of the study. The researcher was then able to recruit an additional six participants. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, and the potential for discrimination and abuse, many of the LGBTQ students were uneasy and fearful about participating in the study. They preferred to remain hidden. It is recommended that future research studies engage in a longer recruitment time so that a larger sample size may be obtained and examined.

Another limitation discerned was the fact that this research study was undertaken in only one tertiary institution. The researcher is of the opinion that other tertiary institutions in The Bahamas can be identified and be used as future settings for a repetition of this research. It is evident based on the results of this research that LGBTQ students in a tertiary institution in The Bahamas have real fears about identifying themselves to this minority grouping.

Recommendations for Future Research

Having completed this research study, the researcher has deduced that more communication should be made available in regard to information for LGBTQ students because they have been identified as being a very important part of the teaching and learning community, despite being a minority population. Therefore, it would be important for researchers to examine academic institutions that have established an LGBTQ inclusive campus and curriculum. In fact, Newman and Fantus (2020) posited that best practices are those activities that can be used as role models and be shared because they yield the greatest results for others to follow. In addition, there should be collaborative efforts to promote and sustain positive changes that will benefit all.

The paucity of information regarding LGBTQ students in academic settings in

The Bahamas denotes that this research study should be undertaken at all levels of academia. This is to capture, intervene, and create solutions to individuals at all ages who identify as being LGBTQ. Therefore, it is important that consideration be given to LGBTQ students at all grade levels to assist them with their academic journey. Research has shown that early intervention is the key in mitigating adverse physical, mental, and social well-being (Dworkin & Schumacher, 2018). Future research can be undertaken to include all tertiary institutions in The Bahamas to recruit a larger sample size and institutions. This would cause a more vigorous study to be undertaken and should yield a comprehensive understanding of the plight of LGBTQ students at other tertiary institutions in The Bahamas.

Conclusion

Fundamentally, there have been no research undertaken in the tertiary institution in The Bahamas that looked directly at the lived experiences of LGBTQ individuals while they were students in the academic setting. The findings from this research study have clearly indicated that the LGBTQ student participants were all subjected to homophobic bullying of various dimensions, which ultimately manifested in physical, mental, and social health challenges. To counteract this, the school climate has to be improved upon with, for example, the infusion of policies, laws, resources, supportive staff, and inclusive curriculum. The researcher interviewed seven participants in regard to their lived tertiary institution experience and utilized the IPA method, which allowed her to discover three significant findings and five themes that summed up the fundamental nature of what the participants encountered.

Additionally, this study was guided by the theoretical frameworks of the planned change theory and the theory of resilience, both of which were used to give direction and

provide the basis for a better understanding of the research. According to Schein (1996), Lewin's planned change theory represents a process where individuals have to be taught and be coached in a learning and caring environment. Moreover, a clear picture of the desired changes must be conveyed to the audience. It is, therefore, prudent to communicate that tertiary institutions in The Bahamas must be LGBTQ ready, as this minority population will continue to be a significant part of the teaching and learning environment. Being ready means to be mentally and physically prepared to be a part of an inclusive, equitable, and collaborative academic environment that respects all students' gender forms.

Conversely, this research findings have indicate that LGBTQ students are demanding and expecting more from tertiary and, actually, all academic institutions. Therefore, it is incumbent that stakeholders in the academic setting be prepared for all students' gender forms and identities. This obligation requires from learning institutions (a) adequate preparation that facilitates proper alignment and promotes favorable outcomes, (b) professional networking to disseminate information, (c) comprehensive strategies that address concerns, and (d) impactful efforts to ensure that the learning and social needs of all students are adequately met and secured.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Date: _____
Time of interview: _____
Interviewee Student Fake Name: _____

Good day. Thank you for agreeing to discuss and share the challenges and issues that you faced while you are in this institution

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of LGBTQ students in a tertiary institution in the Bahamas. It is hoped that a greater understanding of the challenges and issues that they faced while in the academic institution will be ascertained. This information will lead to the creation and implementation of policies and laws that will positively assist LGBTQ students in their academic journey.

Demographic Questions:

1. Are you a junior or senior student?
2. Which school are you presently enrolled in at the university?
3. How many years have you been at the university?
4. How old are you?
5. What is your nationality?
6. Which island or country are you from?
7. How do you describe your racial or ethnic identity?
8. Identify your gender and or sexual orientation?

Interview Questions
1. How do you describe your family support of you as an LGBTQ individual?
2. Tell me about the strategies your college is making to create awareness about and for LGBTQ students.
3. Tell me about your college classroom experiences to date as an LGBTQ student?
4. How do you describe a typical college day in your life?
5. Tell me about your Zoom online class experience.
6. How do you describe your relationship with your peers? Include both the LGBTQ and the heterosexual individuals.
7. Explain the support that you have received from both groups
8. What was your coming out experience like?
9. What problems did you faced as a result of coming out?
10. Have you ever experienced bullying or abuse at school? Tell me about it.
11. How do you describe your relationship with and the support you have received from the college faculty and staff members?
12. How has being LGBTQ affected your mental and physical wellbeing?
13. Tell me about the time you experienced or witness another student being subjected to homophobic actions in the academic environment

14. Can you identify and explain what on campus groups you are involve with? Explain your motivation to join the group.
15. How did the university's academic environment contribute to your growth and development?
16. Can you Identify and explain the LGBTQ campus resources that are available to you?
17. Tell me about the LGBTQ on campus activities? Please describe
18. How do you describe an LGBTQ college ready campus?
19. What would you change as it relates to the campus? Discuss