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Educators Perspectives On Bullying And Cyberbullying Prevention And Intervention Efforts Within The Autism Spectrum Disorder Population

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EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING PREVENTION

AND INTERVENTION EFFORTS WITHIN THE AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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ABSTRACT

All students are at risk of being bullied or cyberbullied. One group of students that may be more at risk of bully victimization is students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Much of the research on bullying and cyberbullying has focused on prevalence rates, students' effectiveness in identifying bullying, and protective factors to reduce the likelihood of bullying. Although Indiana law mandates that students receive research-based instruction in bullying prevention each year, there is limited discussion across the literature of how instruction is provided to students. The purpose of this study was to collect qualitative information surrounding participants' experiences with bullying and cyberbullying in both the neurotypical and ASD populations, and their experiences with observing or delivering anti-bullying instruction. Participants were 10 school staff members employed through a school district in southern Indiana, or the special education cooperative that services the district. Participants were able to provide adequate definitions of bullying and cyberbullying. Prevention and intervention efforts and universally designed instruction strategies included building relationships with students and families, using social skills training and modeling techniques, employing an overall building mission for addressing bullying, and incorporating social emotional learning (SEL) and related practices across the whole school. Last, participants were mixed in reporting confidence levels when working with students who identified as bully victims and perpetrators. When focusing specifically on students with ASD, participants generally expressed the need for help, training and additional resources prior to addressing bullying situations with the students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to Smith et al. (2006), cyberbullying is defined as "an aggressive and

intentional act carried out by a group or individual using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly

and over time, against a victim who cannot easily defend themselves" (para. 2). Given the

increased accessibility of media platforms, children today are increasingly at risk for witnessing,

experiencing, and engaging in cyberbullying. Specifically, from 1999 to 2009 there was a steady

increase in the number of media platforms (e.g., computers and video game consoles) and media

services (e.g., internet access and access to cable or satellite TV) in U.S. homes (Rideout et al.,

2010). Because of the recent expansions in technology and potential for exposure to

cyberbullying, it becomes imperative for adolescents to be able to identify what cyberbullying

looks like and what to do once it is identified in order to avoid becoming cyberbully victims. One

group of individuals that may be particularly vulnerable to cyberbully victimization is those with

autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Individuals with ASD may be at particular risk due to social-

communication deficits and restricted or repetitive behaviors that are observable to others. These

observable behaviors may make individuals with ASD easy targets for bullies to victimize, as

those who are different are often targets for bullies.

In order to respond to the ever-growing technology use, prevention and intervention

efforts are especially important in schools. As discussed by Tanrikulu (2018), prevention efforts

are those that aim to prevent cyberbullying instances before they occur, and intervention efforts are those that intervene in situations where cyberbullying is already present. Although the need for interventions is understood by both educators and researchers, there is vastly more research that simply describes and analyzes the presence of school bullying (Merrell et al., 2008). The proposed study aims to add to the research on bullying and cyberbullying prevention and intervention as it relates specifically to students with ASD. This study aims to better understand school staff's knowledge of bullying and cyberbullying intervention and prevention in the ASD population. This study could also inform school-wide policy and staff needs as they relate to bullying and cyberbullying prevention and intervention.

Background

Although there is not currently national legislation in place surrounding bullying, Congress has become increasingly concerned about the prevalence of high-profile bullying incidents and its negative consequences in the schools (McCallion & Feder, 2013). The most recent available statistics found that in 2019, 22.2% of 12-18 year-olds reported being bullied during the school year (National Center for Education Statistics & Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021). Consistent bullying has been associated with students not feeling connected to their school, which can be expressed as poor attendance, lower academic achievement, psychosocial distress, vandalism, and bullying others to the point of suspension or expulsion (Glew et al., 2008; Phillips, 2011, as cited in Michno, n.d.).

Understanding Traditional Bullying

Bullying is an intentional, repetitive, aggressive behavior that involves an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim (Olweus, 1993). The term "traditional bullying" is often used as an umbrella term to describe more conventional forms of bullying, including physical

bullying, verbal bullying, and relational bullying (Berger, 2007; Menesini, Nocentini, Palladino et al., 2013). Physical bullying refers to bullying that includes some sort of physical violence, such as punching, kicking, or tripping (Berger, 2007). Verbal bullying refers to bullying that includes saying or writing hurtful messages, such as threats and name-calling (Berger, 2007). Relational bullying refers to bullying that is meant to damage social relationships, such as ignoring a person intentionally or spreading gossip (Berger, 2007). Traditional bullying victimization can result in a number of consequences. Academically, students who are victims of bullying tend to avoid school (Hutzell & Payne, 2012), perform more poorly, and demonstrate lower engagement in the classroom as rated by their teachers (Juvonen et al., 2010). Psychologically, students who are victims of bullying tend to report greater amounts of suicidal ideation (Espelage & Holt, 2013; Wyatt Kaminski & Fang, 2009) and feelings of loneliness and low self-esteem (Sung Hong et al., 2015). All of these consequences have the potential to greatly impact students' lives both in and out of the school setting.

Understanding Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is defined as "an aggressive and intentional act carried out by a group or individual using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time, against a victim who cannot easily defend themselves" (Smith et al., 2006, para. 2). This can include, but is not limited to, sending threatening text messages, harassing someone on social media, and sharing a photo or video without the other person's permission. Research suggests that individuals who are traditional bullies and victims of traditional bullying also tend to be cyberbullies and victims of cyberbullying (Vandebosch & van Cleemput, 2009).

Given the availability of electronic media, today's youth are more exposed to cyberbullying than generations in the past. Past generations of youth were likely to spend their

recreational time reading or listening to music, but today's children are more likely to spend their recreational time engaged in a screen-based activity such as watching television or playing video games (Rideout et al., 2010). From 2004 to 2009, adolescents spent an increasing amount of time engaged in online media outside of schoolwork, going from 62 minutes to 89 minutes a day (Rideout et al., 2010). Some technological advances that could explain this increase include, but are not limited to, the expansion of high-speed, home-based internet access, television streaming services, and social networking sites (Rideout et al., 2010). Additionally, Donegan (2012) suggested that bullying expanded into the cyber world due to the development of online chat rooms, cell phones, social media sites, and anonymous blogging outlets.

Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterized by deficits in social communication and social interaction, as well as by restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. ASD is conceptualized as occurring on a spectrum because an individual can demonstrate a wide range of symptoms, skills, and severity. When diagnosing ASD, a clinician also provides a numerical indicator of the level of support needed in the areas of both social communication and restricted patterns of behavior. These levels of support range from a one to a three, with a one indicating the individual needs some support in said areas, and a three indicating the individual needs very substantial support in said areas (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is possible for an individual to need different levels of support across the two diagnostic areas. Children who are colloquially described as "high-functioning" are those who need less support than other children with ASD.

Much of the research on cyberbullying prevalence rates does not separate those with ASD from neurotypical populations. When focusing on the adolescent population, estimates of cyberbullying prevalence rates vary, ranging from 18% to 72%, with the average prevalence rate ranging from 20% to 25% (Gan et al., 2014; Hamm et al., 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Teens report that they are most likely to experience cyberbullying behavior on Facebook or via text message (Rice et al., 2015). This is unsurprising, given that Anderson and Jiang (2018) found that 95% of teenagers had access to a smartphone and 45% of teenagers reported they were online "almost constantly." The authors also reported that the three most popular sites teenagers reported using include YouTube (85%), Instagram (72%), and Snapchat (69%). Facebook was the fourth most popular site, with 51% of teens reporting they used Facebook. Many cyberbully victims also experience long-term consequences. Specifically, when compared to non-victims, cyberbully victims are likely to report more depressive symptoms, have more thoughts surrounding suicidal ideation, and have a lower self-esteem (Bonanno & Hymel, 2013; Chang et al., 2013).

In regard to adolescents with ASD, much of the bullying research focuses on traditional bullying. Prevalence rates of bullying within the ASD population vary between 6% and 63%, with students reporting significantly lower rates of bullying when compared to teacher reports (Anderson, 2014; van Roekel et al., 2010). Compared to neurotypical peers, adolescents with ASD are at a 50% increased risk of being bullied, most notably because of their social skills deficits (Bear et al., 2015). Much like neurotypical adolescents, adolescents with ASD are susceptible to behavioral changes due to frequent and ongoing bullying. Parents of students with ASD report that children who were bullied once or more per week were more likely to display

higher levels of anxiety, hyperactive behaviors, and self-injurious and stereotypic behaviors than children with ASD who were bullied less frequently (Cappadocia et al., 2012).

Students with high-functioning ASD are more likely to report experiences of being the target of bullying than neurotypical peers, which could explain why they are engaged in fewer social interactions during the day and spend break time and lunch time in locations more closely supervised by adults (Wainscot et al., 2008). As Wainscot et al. (2008) propose, these behaviors could be related to the social impairments related to ASD, but they also could be due to students with ASD attempting to minimize their likelihood of being bullied by avoiding areas of the school and/or activities that require extensive communication and interaction with others. Parents of students with ASD were also more likely to report their child being bullied if their child displayed higher-functioning skills (Sterzing et al., 2012). Specifically, parents were more likely to report bullying if their child had greater conversational ability and if their child was mainly educated in inclusive classrooms. This pattern could emerge because inclusive classrooms allow for greater amounts of interaction between neurotypical students and students with ASD. Greater amounts of interaction could allow for students to pick up on characteristics of ASD such as speech patterns and differences in gestures and expressions. While having a disability does not automatically mean a student will be a bully victim, research suggests that students with disabilities are generally more likely to be bullied (Bear et al., 2015; Eckes & Gibbs, 2012), with prevalence rates being estimated as 24.5% in the elementary school years and 34.1% in the middle school years (Blake et al., 2012).

Need for the Study

Students with ASD may be more at risk for cyberbullying since they prefer screen-based activities to non-screen-based activities (Mazurek et al., 2012; Shane & Albert, 2008). They also

have difficulty disengaging from screen-based activities (Nally et al., 2000). Most research

regarding cyberbullying and ASD focuses on prevalence rates; however, studies have found that

individuals with ASD are able to report their experiences as a cyberbully victim (Ashburner et

al., 2018; Campbell et al., 2017; Ko, 2014; Kowalski et al., 2016; Robertson, 2013; Yoon-Suk et

al., 2017). Despite this, there is limited research on the knowledge and skills that students with

ASD have when asked to prevent or respond to bullying victimization. Given that students with

ASD can identify instances of cyberbully victimization independently, more research is

warranted in how to provide students with ASD knowledge and tools to prevent cyberbully

victimization and to intervene if they are a victim or are a bystander to a cyberbullying act.

Purpose and Importance

The purpose of the current study was to elicit educators' perspectives regarding the

supports and strategies that would benefit all students, including those with ASD, in the area of

cyberbullying prevention and intervention. Utilizing a qualitative lens, current teachers, support

staff, and special education support staff were asked open-ended interview questions about their

perceptions of bullying and cyberbullying, their knowledge of utilizing universally designed

instruction to address cyberbullying prevention and intervention when working with both

neurotypical students and students with ASD, and their confidence in intervening in instances of

bullying and cyberbullying involving both neurotypical students and students with ASD. This

study has important implications for school-wide policy, as it could help administrators and other

school staff to create an anti-bullying policy and education program that could be used for all

students year-round. In addition, this study could highlight the need for more training and

professional development opportunities for school staff within the areas of bullying prevention

and intervention. It could also indicate that staff need to be more aware of and involved in

school-specific bullying policies. Focusing specifically on students with ASD, this study could shed light on the need for professional development in better understanding ASD and how to work with students who need varying levels of support. It could also challenge educators to consider how they could ensure bullying and cyberbullying instruction is accessible and meaningful for all students.

Secondary Aims for Study

This study addressed important implications surrounding legislation and statewide concerns. Indiana Code §20-30-5-5.5 (Bullying Prevention Student Instruction Act, 2015) mandates that, no later than October 15 of each year, each public school must provide age appropriate, research-based instruction focused on bullying prevention for all students in grades 1-12. This code also states that instruction is to be delivered by a school safety specialist, school counselor, or another person with training and expertise in the area of bullying prevention and intervention with the aid of outlines or other hands-on materials. The results from this study could impact how this instruction is delivered to all students using universal design tools. By utilizing a qualitative approach, the current study aimed to explore how prevention and intervention materials could not only be targeted towards students with ASD, but could be used effectively with neurotypical students as well.

The results from this study could also aid in combating statewide concerns regarding bullying. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2012), Indiana ranked third in the nation for incidences of electronic bullying and bullying on school property. Specifically, one in four students had been bullied at school during the past 12 months prior to the survey, and one in five students had been bullied electronically during the past 12 months prior to the survey. Also, one in 20 youth did not go to

school in the past 30 days prior to the survey for fear of safety at school or going to and from school. Results from the present study could provide educators with ideas and strategies to help guide their prevention and intervention materials in the hopes of combating cyberbullying in their schools.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The presented literature review will focus on cyberbullying across neurotypical adolescents and adolescents with ASD. First, an overview of traditional bullying and cyberbullying will be discussed in order to provide an understanding of bullying within a neurotypical adolescent population. Second, both traditional and cyberbullying within the ASD population will be reviewed, as well as factors that could influence students with ASD to be bullied. Next, an overview of media use and perceptions of cyberbullying within the ASD population will be provided. Finally, research will be provided related to prevention and intervention efforts for both traditional bullying and cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying – What Is It?

Definitions of cyberbullying are widespread and plentiful, so selecting the "ideal" definition can be challenging; however, all definitions state that cyberbullying describes bullying using electronic platforms (Gradinger et al., 2010). For the purposes of this research project, the definition offered by Smith et al. (2006) will be used, which defines cyberbullying as "an aggressive and intentional act carried out by a group or individual using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time, against a victim who cannot easily defend themselves" (para. 2).

Difficulties With Defining Cyberbullying

Currently, there is not one universally accepted definition of cyberbullying. Even the definition posited by Smith et al. (2006) contains elements that are not endorsed by all researchers. Oftentimes, when attempting to create a definition for cyberbullying, researchers borrow elements from the definition for "bullying" and add a portion that captures the electronic aspect of "cyber." Langos (2012) suggested that oftentimes "cyber" and "bullying" are interpreted separately rather than as one word. Kowalski et al. (2014) offered two hypotheses as to why a common definition has not been reached. One hypothesis is that, like traditional bullying, cyberbullying can be difficult to identify and measure because it can take on multiple forms. As outlined by Li (2007a), there are seven main types of cyberbullying:

1. Flaming: bullies send messages with angry, rude, or vulgar content.

2. Online harassment: messages are sent repeatedly.

3. Cyberstalking: bullies send threatening or intimidating messages.

4. Denigration: bullies send negative and/or false information about one person to another or to a group.

5. Masquerading: bullies are pretending to be someone else with the intention of ruining a person's life.

6. Outing: bullies spread rumors or share private information about one person with another.

7. Exclusion: bullies intentionally leave someone out of an online group.

Cyberbullies can also take on different personas, including wanting to exert authority and control, acting as a vigilante, or unknowingly becoming a cyberbully by responding to an online stimulus without thinking about the consequences of their actions (Arrigo, 2014).

Another hypothesis posed by Kowalski et al. (2014) is that cyberbullying can be difficult to identify and measure because it can occur within a multitude of venues. Any electronic platform that allows for communication can be used as a means to cyberbully, including email, text messaging, instant messaging, social media, and chatrooms. Subsequently, the way cyberbullying presents itself may look different across platforms, and can easily become overwhelming if victimization is occurring across multiple platforms.

Components of Bullying

According to Smith et al. (2013), bullying is an aggressive, intentional, and repeated act that presents a level of imbalance between the bully and the victim. In fact, Smith et al. (2006) also mentions all of these elements in their definition of cyberbullying; however, the notions of power imbalance and repetition within the cyberbullying realm appear different when compared to traditional bullying.

When considering power imbalance in traditional bullying, bullies often use personal characteristics such as popularity, physical strength, sex, or age to assert perceived or actual power over a victim (Langos, 2012). However, many of these characteristics are inapplicable when assessing power imbalance in cyberspace. For example, due to the lack of face-to-face interaction between a bully and their victim, overpowering through the use of physical strength or other characteristics is irrelevant (Dooley et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2013). The element of anonymity that is predominant in cyberbullying adds to a diminished level of power imbalance because victims often do not know who their bully is, so they cannot attribute intimidating characteristics to that person (Smith et al., 2013). If a cybervictim is aware of their bully's identity, a bully's popularity may still serve as a way to assert power imbalance; however, if the bully remains anonymous, popularity would be harder to detect. Some researchers (Patchin &

Hinduja, 2006; Vandebosch & van Cleemput, 2009) argued that electronic media users who have more advanced technological skills have the upper hand when asserting power in cyberspace; however, as stated by Dooley et al. (2009), cyberbullying does not always require advanced skills. In other words, acts such as sending pictures via text or posting pictures online requires a few simple steps that many electronic media users know well.

Repetition is another essential characteristic in traditional bullying. Smith et al. (2013) suggested that prolonged interactions between a bully and victim can serve as a catalyst for repetition to occur. For example, two students who have similar school schedules and are together for the majority of the day have prolonged interaction in the classroom and during transition periods, where the bully has multiple opportunities to antagonize their victim. However, defining repetition of cyberbullying incidents is difficult. Langos (2012) described how a single cyberbullying act (e.g., posting one photo or sending one text message) has the potential to be stored indefinitely and be forwarded to a multitude of users. Repetition can also occur by the cyberbully repetitively contacting the victim (Langos, 2012). These two types of repetition also can have different effects on the victim. As suggested by Dooley et al. (2009), the single-act form of repetition can result in widespread ridicule and ongoing humiliation, given that many people may have seen the post or message, but having multiple correspondences with the same bully likely results in the victim experiencing more fear of that particular bully.

Roles in Cyberbullying

Despite the debate surrounding the definitions of traditional bullying and cyberbullying, both types have the same participant structure. In any bullying situation, there are usually at least three people or groups of people involved: a bully, a victim, and a bystander. As described by Cohn and Canter (2003), a bully is someone who directs physical, verbal, or psychological

aggression or harassment toward others with the goal of gaining power over or dominating

another individual (a victim). Although cyberbullies are unable to direct physical aggression

towards their victims, they still act as a bully through online or digital communication toward a

victim (Cohn & Canter, 2003).

As a result of cyberbullying, victims often experience difficulties across all areas of their

lives. In terms of academics, victims of cyberbullying tend to experience lower school

performance, lower school attachment, and poorer attendance (Kowalski & Limber, 2013;

Schneider et al., 2012; Steiner & Rasberry, 2015). Socially, victims of cyberbullying may lose

friends, lose trust with others, or struggle with feeling socially accepted (Boulton et al., 2010;

Kowalski et al., 2008). Psychologically, cyberbullying is associated with a number of mental

health concerns, including more depressive symptoms, more feelings of anxiety, more thoughts

surrounding suicidal ideation, more attempts of suicide, and lower reports of self-esteem

(Bonanno & Hymel, 2013; Chang et al., 2013; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012).

Bystanders, or individuals who witness bullying incidents between a bully and their

victim, arguably play a crucial role in the bullying cycle, as they have been referred to as "the

invisible engine in the cycle of bullying" (Twemlow et al., 2001, p. 9). Prevalence rates for

bystanders of cyberbullying within the middle school and high school years vary from 25% to

76% (Mishna et al., 2012; Vandebosch & van Cleemput, 2009). They can impact the

perpetuation of both traditional bullying and cyberbullying by adopting one or more of the

following roles defined by Niblack (2013). One role bystanders could serve is acting as

reinforcers, who side with the bully and encourage the bully to continue victimization. Another

role bystanders could serve is acting as outsiders, who remain uninvolved in the bullying and do

not take sides with either the bully or the victim. The final role bystanders could serve is acting

as defenders, who side with the victim by encouraging them to defend themselves. Defenders could also attempt to solve the problem independently by standing up to the bully on behalf of the victim.

While traditional bullying and cyberbullying may share similarities in the types of individuals involved, cyberbullying is quite different from traditional bullying. Peebles (2014) noted a number of ways that cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying. Primarily, individuals need to have some level of technical expertise in order to act as a bully or experience victimization. With cyberbullying also comes anonymity, where a bully is able to stay hidden behind technology. This may allow individuals to act more harshly than they would in real life. Other major differences include that a victim of cyberbullying often has no reprieve from bullying events due to being able to be reached at any time, and that the potential audience of bystanders is larger than traditional bullying. Smith (2012) expanded on these differences.Specifically, according to Smith, cyberbullies often have to trade anonymity for response time; in other words, due to the lack of face-to-face contact between cyberbullies and their victims, cyberbullies are unable to see immediately the victim's reaction to their attack. Smith also suggested that cyberbullying requires users to have some level of technological experience and that cyberbullying is often indirect, or not face-to-face, due to the anonymity. While not all cyberbullying acts are anonymous, as suggested by many cybervictims knowing their cyberbully (Smith et al., 2008), anonymity tends to increase victims' feelings of frustration and powerlessness (Menesini, Nocentini, Camodeca, et al., 2013).

Theoretical Frameworks Relevant to Cyberbullying

One theory that is relevant to understanding cyberbullying is deindividuation. Deindividuation was first proposed by Gustave LeBon in 1895 when he described crowd

behavior (as cited in Fiske, 2014). LeBon proposed that when people are in a crowd, they lose their individual sense of identity and are instead dominated by the group's mindset. He argued that this shift occurred in response to personal accountability being lower due to anonymity. Zimbardo (1969) expanded on this idea, stating that individuals could become deindividuated or disinhibited given conditions including anonymity, low individual responsibility, arousal, mind-altering substances, sensory overload, or ill-defined situations. Deindividuation can apply to cyberbullying given its high amounts of anonymity, low amounts of individual responsibility, and abundance of ill-defined situations. As suggested by Hinduja and Patchin (2014), the high degree of anonymity that cyberspace provides could provoke individuals to act in a more deviant manner because they could more easily blend into the "crowd" of internet users. Additionally, they argue that deindividuation online could cause individuals to reduce their self-awareness and self-regulation skills. This could result in individuals engaging in impulsive acts that resemble cyberbullying behavior, including posting something negative on social media, uploading something inappropriate on the internet, or sending a harassing message to another internet user.

Another theory that can be used to understand cyberbullying is social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory, proposed by Albert Bandura in 1986, emphasizes a triadic relationship between an individual's personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. Specifically, personal factors such as goals or self-efficacy, behavioral factors such as attention and motivation, and environmental factors such as available role models and reinforcement, all contribute to an individual's learning (Bandura, 1986, as cited in Schunk, 2011). Xiao and Wong (2013) proposed a theory of understanding cyberbullying using a social cognitive framework. They argued that personal, behavioral, and environmental factors all contribute to an individual learning and engaging in cyberbullying behavior. Personal factors include internet self-efficacy,

which describes an individual's belief in their own capabilities to understand and use the internet effectively (Eastin & LaRose, 2000), cybervictimization experience, and demographic variables such as age and gender. Behavioral factors include an individual's motivation and attention to what is happening on the internet. Environmental factors include social norms and reinforcement of other users' cyberbullying behaviors. Thus, understanding the influence of all factors can help in predicting when cyberbullying behavior is likely to occur.

A major component to social cognitive theory is observational learning, which asserts that individuals learn through observing others' behavior and repeating it themselves (Bandura, 1986). As proposed by Swearer et al. (2014), individuals may learn cyberbullying behaviors through observing others online. They could become motivated to bully through observation of others being positively reinforced for bullying behaviors. The authors suggest that bullying prevention and intervention programs should focus on effective problem-solving skills and prosocial behaviors in order to target the relationship between cognitions, emotions, and behaviors.

A final theory that can be used to understand cyberbullying is choice theory, which is a lesser known theory within the area of counseling. Choice theory was first proposed in 1985 by William Glasser, who suggested that people are motivated to behave in an effort to achieve Quality World (i.e., an ideal state of being in which all needs are met; as cited in Tanrikulu, 2014). In order to achieve Quality World, individuals are faced with the power to control their current and future behaviors by choosing ways in which to address their needs. Tanrikulu (2014) suggested that within the realm of cyberbullying, individuals may make choices in order to fulfill their needs. Specifically, they may be seeking some form of entertainment, they may be seeking revenge as a result of their own victimization, or they may be seeking a relationship with other

technology users. Tanrikulu also described that cyberbullies may view their behaviors as socially acceptable means to achieve their Quality World.

Cyberbullying in the Neurotypical Population

As stated previously, prevalence rates of cyberbullying victimization within the adolescent population range from 18% to 72%, with the average prevalence rate ranging from 20% to 25% (Gan et al., 2014; Hamm et al., 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Understanding what cyberbullying behavior looks like and who is likely to be involved within the neurotypical population allows comparison of the experiences of neurotypical youth with the experiences of individuals with ASD. Understanding what cyberbullying looks like within both populations is also important in developing appropriate and effective intervention strategies that can be used across an entire school building.

What Does Cyberbullying Look Like?

Although traditional bullying most often occurs at school (Kowalski & Whittaker, 2015), cyberbullying is more likely to occur outside of school (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Because cyberbullying does not require direct contact, bullies can often contact their victims quite easily through cell phones or the internet at all hours of the day (Kowalski & Whittaker, 2015). In addition, as suggested by Smith et al. (2008), schools often put restrictions on cell phone and internet use, making it more difficult for bullies to reach their victims electronically during the school day. Despite the fact that most incidents of cyberbullying happen outside of schools, many cybervictims report that they definitely know or likely know the identity of their cyberbully from school (Smith et al., 2008).

The platforms on which cyberbullying has taken place has shifted over time. Research conducted by Juvonen and Gross in 2008 suggested that cyberbullying was most likely to occur

on instant messenger platforms and message boards where users were observed engaging in name-calling or insulting one another most frequently. Other cyberbullying acts included stealing passwords, making threats, sharing embarrassing pictures, and violating other users' privacy. More current research by Anderson and Jiang (2018) suggested that most teens use YouTube (85%), Instagram (72%), and Snapchat (69%). Teenagers identified that they use Snapchat (35% and YouTube (32%) most often. Teenagers in the sample (27%) also identified that social media can have a negative effect on others their age because the use of social media can result in bullying or spreading rumors. As suggested by Dredge et al. (2014), cyberbullying via social media can take on a multitude of forms and impact various areas of a user's life. The three most common cyberbullying behaviors on social media platforms included bullies posting cruel messages or threats on the participants' personal account, bullies sending abusive or cruel emails or inbox messages on the participants' personal account, and participants observing bullies post cruel messages or threats onto another user's account. In addition, due to the bullying on social media platforms, 100% of victims reported experiencing an emotional impact, 84% reported a behavioral impact, and 80% reported a social impact, although no specific examples were described (Dredge et al., 2014).

Research also suggests that cyberbullying behavior may involve different patterns of behavior for girls compared to boys. According to Snell and Englander (2010), girls reported more problems with cyberbullying on Facebook; specifically, they were more likely to report cyberbullies posting harassing and threatening posts or false stories on their profiles. Additionally, girls were reportedly more likely to post gossip online with the intent to hurt other users than were boys (Marcum et al., 2012). Marcum et al. (2012) proposed that this is likely due to girls preferring the anonymity of cyberbullying to a face-to-face confrontation, which is

consistent with the notion that girls tend to prefer indirect forms of bullying in general (Kokkinos & Antoniadou, 2013; Mishna, 2012; Owens et al., 2000). In contrast, boys tend to be more aggressive in cyberspace than girls, which is evidenced by typing messages in all capital letters to indicate yelling and using intimidation tactics in chatrooms (Mishna & Van Wert, 2013). Carducci and Kaiser (2015) proposed that boys may be more likely to engage in intimidating behavior in order to fulfill the stereotype that boys are supposed to be assertive and masculine. They also proposed that both boys and girls who bully may do so in order to deflect attention from their personal weaknesses and insecurities, or because using aggression to resolve social conflict has been modeled in their home environments.

Who Are Likely to Be Cyberbullies and Cybervictims?

Research is mixed regarding the typical profile of a cyberbully. Typically, cyberbullying behaviors emerge in middle school and extend into older adolescence and adulthood (Kowalski et al., 2014; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). However, this does not mean that elementary-aged students are not exposed to cyberbullying. Englander (2012) focused on students in third, fourth, and fifth grades and found that, while traditional in-school bullying was more common, cyberbullying behaviors were also present. Cyberbullying was most likely to occur within online games, but also through Facebook, email, and text messaging. Englander recognized that users have to be at least 13 years of age to have their own Facebook accounts and suggested that parents may not recognize age restrictions on Facebook or other websites. These findings highlight that specific, age-appropriate intervention regarding cyberbullying is required for all students and that intervention should start as soon as possible. In regard to victimization, as in traditional bullying, cyberbully victims are likely to be in the same grade as the bully (Smith & Slonje, 2010).

The relationship between cyberbullying and gender is not well understood, given the discrepancies across the literature. Some research suggests that girls are more likely to be cyberbullies because they prefer to bully indirectly rather than face-to-face (Gorzig & Olafsson, 2013; Snell & Englander, 2010). Other research suggests that boys are more likely to be cyberbullies (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015; Li, 2006), which is consistent with literature that suggests that boys are also more likely to be traditional bullies (Erdur-Baker, 2010; Olweus, 1993). Olweus (1993) also suggested that this pattern may emerge because girls' preferences for indirect bullying such as spreading rumors and gossiping make it more difficult to detect. Other research seems to suggest a relationship between age and gender. Specifically, Barlett and Coyne (2014) reported that girls are more likely to report being a cyberbully during early adolescence, while boys are more likely to report being a cyberbully during later adolescence. Thus, the gender differences may differ developmentally. In regard to victimization, it is generally agreed that girls are more likely to be affected by cyberbullying (Li, 2007b; Notar et al., 2013; Rice et al., 2015).

Research supports the existence of a relationship between traditional bullying and cyberbullying, both in engaging as the bully and in being the victim. In other words, individuals who are bullied online are also more likely to be bullied at school (Beran & Li, 2007; Vandebosch & van Cleemput, 2009). Additionally, perpetrators of cyberbullying are likely to be both victims and perpetrators of traditional bullying (Erdur-Baker, 2010; Li, 2007b; Smith et al., 2008; Vandebosch & van Cleemput, 2009). These overlaps may be explained by the similar features of power imbalance, intentionality, and repetition that characterize both bullying and cyberbullying, thus facilitating the transfer of behavioral patterns across traditional settings and cyberspace (Erdur-Baker, 2010). Another possible explanation for the consistency between being

a traditional bully and cyberbully is that the traditional bully may use the digital world to further exploit their victims and maximize potential damage (Tokunaga, 2010).

School Personnel's Awareness of Interventions in Bullying

Since students are in school for approximately seven hours per day, school staff have a responsibility to be aware of and intervene in acts of bullying. However, awareness and intervention may not always be easy, particularly if students are not reporting instances of bullying. Fekkes et al. (2005) found that almost half of children who were victims of bullying did not report the incident to their teacher. Furthermore, when examining students who did report bullying incidents to their teacher, teachers were reported to successfully stop the bullying only 49% of the time. Additionally, Craig et al. (2000) report that teachers are more likely to intervene in bullying incidents when they observe them happening rather than having the incidents reported to them.

Bush (2009) discussed a number of factors associated with teachers' responses to bullying in his literature review. These included gender, amount of teaching experience, grade level taught, and the teacher's perceived seriousness of the bullying incident. First, Bush reported that male teachers typically engaged in a more aggressive style of discipline when addressing male bullies as opposed to female bullies, and that female teachers were typically more consistent in their discipline approach. In addition, veteran teachers (i.e., 10 or more years of teaching experience) reported engaging in more bullying intervention efforts than did beginning teachers (i.e., one to four years of teaching experience) or experienced teachers (i.e., five to ten years of teaching experience). Bush also found that elementary teachers more often confronted physical bullying and middle and high school teachers were more exposed to verbal and relational bullying. Thus, given the different levels of exposure to different types of bullying,

teachers may have had more or fewer opportunities to respond to all types of bullying. Finally, teachers were generally more likely to respond to physical bullying than verbal or relational bullying, as physical bullying was perceived as the most significant.

Most teachers and administrators are familiar with what cyberbullying is, but are not as familiar with what to do about it (Eden et al., 2013; Styron et al., 2016). Eden, et al. (2013) assessed teachers' perceptions about cyberbullying, and found that only 20-38% of teachers felt confident in identifying cyberbullying and/or felt confident in managing cyberbullying. Similarly, Li (2009) described that pre-service teachers had little confidence in handling cyberbullying, although their level of concern about the issue was high. Stryon et al. (2016) included both teachers and principals in their sample, and found that their participants wanted more pre-service training in order to effectively deal with the impact of cyberbullying.

In addition to teachers and administrators, school psychologists also need to be aware of bullying and cyberbullying incidents. School psychologists can often serve as a resource for both students and staff by providing counseling to bullies and victims, helping identify students at-risk for bullying or victimization, and organizing efforts to prevent contact between the bully and victim (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). School psychologists can also assist by promoting awareness of cyberbullying amongst parents and school staff, initiating prevention programs, and sharing resources with students and staff (Diamonduros et al., 2008).

Bullying in the ASD Population

There is limited information available regarding bully victimization within groups of children with disabilities, including ASD. When compared to studies conducted using neurotypical samples, research regarding both traditional bullying and cyberbullying among

individuals with ASD in particular is scarce and covers a limited range of areas related to bullying.

Blake et al. (2012) proposed two explanations as to why there is such scarcity of bullying and cyberbullying research with children with disabilities. One reason is how bully victimization is measured. Oftentimes, when attempting to determine prevalence rates of victimization, researchers aim to gather peer reports; however, neurotypical peers likely do not give accurate reports of bullying for their peers with disabilities due to their limited interactions. Specifically, Hilton and Liberty (1992) found that fewer than five percent of interactions between neurotypical students and students with disabilities were social in nature. More recently, Carter and Hughes (2005) reported that students with disabilities attend fewer classes with their neurotypical peers and do not participate as frequently in school activities as neurotypical peers, which limits the interactions between the two groups. Thus, limited interactions between neurotypical students and students with disabilities, including those with ASD, likely impact peer reports of bullying. Additionally, self-reports could also become problematic because students may under-report their bullying victimization experiences. Research by Petrosino et al. (2010) for the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance reported that 64% of students who are bullied do not report their experiences, which may be because they are fearful of more bullying, or they think they will be viewed as a "rat" or "snitch" (Subramanian, 2014). Teacher and parent ratings also do not typically align with student-reported prevalence of bullying, which could be due to students not reporting the incidents (Holt et al., 2009), either because they perceive adults as not taking the accusations seriously or as not helping to stop the bullying (Marshall et al., 2009). In sum, the lack of consistent data and data sources make it difficult to gather accurate data surrounding bully victimization in students with disabilities.

Blake et al. (2012) also suggested that there may be a lack of research on bullying among students with disabilities because of how certain disabilities are defined. Nationally, clinicians use the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), but this diagnosis does not always guarantee a student will qualify as a student with a disability in order to earn special education services. In Indiana, special education eligibility guidelines are outlined in Article 7 (Indiana Article 7 – Special Education, Ind. Admin. Code, 2022), but, as with DSM-5 diagnoses, being eligible for special education does not guarantee a student will receive a clinical diagnosis. Thus, this distinction of what qualifies as a student being labeled "disabled" is multifaceted and inconsistent. This inconsistency may complicate the definition and identification of students with disabilities in bullying research, depending, for example, upon whether samples are drawn from school-based or community samples and whether educational or clinical diagnostic labels are applied.

When examining traditional bullying between neurotypical adolescents and adolescents with ASD, there are some similarities. As found by Cappadocia et al. (2012), students with ASD aged 5-21 are more likely to be verbally or socially bullied than physically bullied, which is similar to students within a neurotypical population. Additionally, Wainscot et al. (2008) reported that students with ASD aged 11-18 were more likely to report being bullied through non-physical methods including being ignored and teased. More recent research conducted by Kloosterman et al. (2013) supported this finding that students with ASD aged 11-18 were more likely to be socially bullied, whereas other adolescents with special needs reported more physical bullying. Cappadocia et al. (2012) also reported that, as with the neurotypical population, victimization of bullying peaks during middle school and the transition into high school. Research also suggests that students with ASD are likely to experience similar long-term

consequences due to bullying victimization, including suicidal ideation (Mayes et al., 2013) and greater amounts of anxiety (Cappadocia et al., 2012).

While there are some similarities in traditional bullying between adolescents within the neurotypical population and adolescents with ASD, there are also differences. First, as reported by Cappadocia et al. (2012), boys with ASD tend to be victimized more than girls with ASD. This gender difference could be due to two main factors. First, only one in five individuals with ASD are girls and women (Jamison & Schuttler, 2015), so including females with ASD in research studies targeting bullying may be challenging. Second, girls with ASD tend to demonstrate fewer and/or less severe behaviors commonly associated with ASD, such that girls have a higher ability to control their emotions at school, are better able to mimic others in social situations, and are more likely to form one or two close alliances (Sarris, 2015). Thus, because girls with ASD are likely to have better social skills, they may not be as easy for their peers to identify and victimize. Cappadocia et al. (2012) further notes that students with ASD may exhibit behaviors that are uncommon in bullying victims within the neurotypical population, including heightened levels of hyperactivity (e.g., challenging authority and exhibiting restlessness or high energy), self-injurious and stereotypic behaviors (e.g., physically harming themselves and repeated instances of flapping or waving body parts), and oversensitivity (e.g., instances of temper tantrums and having feelings hurt easily) as measured by the Nisonger Child Behavior Rating Form—Parent Form (Aman et al., 1996). These behaviors may set these students apart from their neurotypical peers, and increase the likelihood of their victimization.

Although research on bullying and cyberbullying within the ASD population is scarce, Ko (2014) conducted a qualitative study examining adolescents with Asperger's Syndrome and high-functioning autism. The study sought to examine the online experiences of 10 adolescents

with high-functioning autism, with some focus on participants' experiences with cyberbullying. Ko found that the majority of participants had not experienced cyberbullying and, instead, described online experiences which they thought were similar to cyberbullying but that the participants would not consider to be cyberbullying. When asked to define cyberbullying, participants typically were able to identify that cyberbullying acts involved harming or threatening another person through electronic means. Participants were also able to identify three negative social interactions that can occur online: negativity, trolling, and cyberbullying. Negativity, which was generally rated as the least severe, was defined as being the recipient of negative comments or behavior that resulted in feelings of discouragement or embarrassment; however, participants recognized that negativity was likely not purposefully directed toward them. Trolling was defined as users actively and intentionally trying to aggravate other users through words or actions. Trolling was considered more of a "nuisance" or "annoyance," but was not considered a form of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying was rated as the most severe negative online interaction; the few who reported experiencing cyberbullying reported feeling anxious and "really scared." Participants stated that cyberbullying involved harming or threatening another individual through electronic means that was often done anonymously. Due to the anonymity, three of the 10 participants described cyberbullying as being a cowardly act.

Much of the available research focuses on individuals with ASD as being victims of bullying; however, individuals with ASD may also act as bullies. Bogdashina (2006) reported that, similar to victims of both traditional and cyberbullying, individuals with ASD may bully and insult others in order to compensate for their low self-esteem and to seek revenge on those who have bullied them. Anderson (2014) found that 20% of students with ASD bullied others, compared to 8% of neurotypical students. This latter finding is inconsistent with other literature,

which suggests a higher prevalence rate of bullying in neurotypical populations. However, the author cautioned that these results were preliminary, so further research is needed to replicate these findings. Additionally, when examining consequences of bullying and victimization within the ASD population, Zablotsky et al. (2013) found that bullies with ASD are more likely to present with internalizing symptoms, whereas victims with ASD are more likely to present with emotion regulation difficulties.

Factors That Contribute to Students With ASD Being Bullied

Van Roekel et al. (2010) asserted that students with ASD may be at a higher risk for victimization than other students. This higher risk can be most notably attributed to their impaired theory of mind skills, difficulties making and maintaining friendships, and lower levels of conversational and vocabulary skills.

Theory of Mind

Theory of mind refers to the ability to attribute mental states, such as thoughts, knowledge, beliefs, emotions, and desires to oneself and others (Sodian & Kristen, 2010). Theory of mind typically develops during the first five years of life; by age two, children usually are able to understand that people feel happy when they get what they want, and they feel sad when they do not get what they want (Astington & Edward, 2010). Additionally, by age two to three, children usually are able to talk about what they and others want, like, feel, and know (Astington & Edward, 2010). By age four, children usually are able to recognize that their thoughts and others' thoughts may not be true. For instance, when presented with a closed cookie jar with candy inside, four year olds usually guess there are cookies inside; after they are shown the candy, they will respond that someone else will think there are cookies inside (Astington & Edward, 2010). As children age, advanced theory of mind skills begin to take shape, including

understanding the intention of others' actions, understanding that other people have different desires and different levels of knowledge, and understanding false beliefs (de Villers, 2007). Those who have less developed theory of mind skills are often more at risk for bully victimization and exploitation because they have difficulties detecting social cues that indicate nonreciprocal interactions (Shakoor et al., 2012). For example, individuals with ASD may interpret any sort of peer attention as positive, even when they are actually being teased or manipulated. When focusing on cyberbullying, it is often difficult to interpret sarcastic or ironic messages within cyberspace without the use of nonverbal cues, which could help interpret a user's actual intention or belief.

Baron-Cohen et al. (1985) were the first to propose the idea that individuals with ASD have impaired theory of mind skills compared to neurotypical individuals. Other researchers have supported this idea, finding that individuals with ASD have marked impairment in theory of mind skills due to their difficulties with taking other people's perspectives (Tickle & Stott, 2010; Zelazo et al., 2002). Other features of ASD could also contribute to individuals' impairment in theory of mind skills. As presented by Bogdashina (2006), individuals with ASD often are "one-sided" in their conversations, where they are often focused on themselves and their own interests, and are unable to integrate pieces of information together to make coherent wholes. In other words, individuals with ASD often experience difficulty in detecting nonverbal cues that signal another person does not want to talk (e.g., looking away, creating physical distance, turning their body), as well as a number of other nonverbal cues. Additionally, individuals with ASD often have marked language impairments, which could also contribute to their impaired theory of mind skills by not being able to exchange sarcastic or ironic comments when interacting with peers.

Social Skills

Students with ASD often have difficulty making friends because they lack the social skills required to interact with others effectively and conventionally, which puts them at a unique disadvantage (Rao et al., 2008). Specifically, the DSM-5 outlines deficits that could contribute to difficulty making friends and joining groups, including a lack of social-emotional reciprocity, difficulty with recognizing nonverbal communication used for social interaction, and difficulty developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In any situation, friendships are important because they serve as learning experiences for relational intimacy, companionship, support, and protection; friendships are also important for mastering developmental tasks (Kochel et al., 2015). Thus, having a network of quality friends who offer support and protection can act as a buffer against bully victimization (Skrzypiec et al., 2012). However, bully victims tend to have fewer friends than non-victims and may have difficulties making friends and joining peer groups (Eslea et al., 2003; Perren & Alsaker, 2006; Wang et al., 2009), and victims tend to experience greater declines in peer acceptance from fall to spring (Kochel et al., 2015). Individuals with ASD are at a unique disadvantage because of their tendency toward having fewer friends, and their marked deficits in initiating and maintaining relationships.

Communication Ability

Research studies suggest that students with ASD who are higher functioning and have stronger communication abilities tend to be bullied more frequently than those who are lower functioning (Cappadocia et al., 2012; Sterzing et al., 2012; Wainscot et al., 2008). This could be related to a number of factors. First, as suggested by Zablotsky et al. (2017), students with higher levels of language and social functioning could be more able to report bullying experiences to

their parents. Due to the lack of self-report-based research in the ASD population in regards to bullying, researchers typically have to rely on parent or teacher reports of bullying prevalence. Thus, some of this difference may be attributable to better reporting for higher functioning students. Additionally, higher-functioning students with ASD are more likely to be mainstreamed into the general education classroom. Sterzing et al. (2012) and Zablotsky et al. (2014) found that parents were more likely to report bullying if their child had greater conversational ability and if their child was mainly educated in the inclusive classroom. Inclusive classrooms offer the benefit of more opportunities for socialization; however, more frequent interactions and higher exposure to larger groups of neurotypical peers could also allow more opportunity for neurotypical students to identify and target students with ASD due to their unique social and behavioral characteristics.

The Use of Media Within the ASD Population

There is general consensus that individuals with ASD typically watch greater amounts of television and play video games more frequently than the neurotypical population (Chonchaiya et al., 2011; Healy et al., 2017; Mazurek & Englehardt, 2013; Mazurek & Wenstrup, 2013). Not only is the frequency of use different across populations, but intent of use also tends to be different. Gillespie-Lynch et al. (2014) found that individuals with ASD preferred internet activities associated with special interests or advocacy (e.g., blogging) instead of meeting new people and maintaining in-person social connections. Furthermore, Durkin et al. (2010) found that adolescents with ASD, compared to their neurotypical peers, were less likely to have access to cellphones. When they did have access to a cellphone, adolescents with ASD reported that they were most likely to use it to search the internet and take photographs, while their neurotypical peers were most likely to use their phones for talking to friends and family (Durkin

et al., 2010). In addition, Mazurek et al. (2012) reported that 64% of children ages 13 to 16 with

ASD do not use email or chatrooms at all. However, a study conducted by Mazurek (2013) found

that a majority of adult participants with ASD (79.6%) used social networking sites, and that

participants most commonly cited social connection as the reason for utilizing those sites.

The internet can be a useful tool or social opportunity for any user, including social

networking possibilities, business networking, and online researching. For individuals with ASD,

the internet may be especially useful for expanding on their interests and networking with other

users who share those same interests (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2014). Another benefit for

individuals with ASD is that technology use can assist in increasing independence, reducing

anxiety, and increasing social opportunities (Hedges et al., 2018). Adults with ASD report that

communicating online can be more comfortable because the internet lends itself to more concise

and clearer communication and eliminates the need to worry about non-verbal communication

cues e.g., facial expressions) that are present in face-to-face conversations (Benford & Standen,

2009).

Perceptions of Cyberbullying Within the ASD Population

Individuals with ASD are generally able to identify that they have been victims of

cyberbullying. When asked to provide reasons why bullies may target them, adolescents with

ASD responded that it could be due to personal attributes (e.g., the situation was their fault, they

are not approachable) or due to the bully's perceptions of them (e.g., other students may not want

to be around them; Fisher & Taylor, 2016). Similar to individuals within the neurotypical

population, there are often negative consequences once a person with ASD has been identified as

a bullying target. As reported by Kowalski et al. (2016), individuals with disabilities, including

ASD, experience lower self-esteem and higher feelings of depression once they have been

cyberbullied. Qualitative research conducted by Robertson (2013) found that bullying often shapes the experiences, emotions, and perceptions of adolescents with ASD. Specifically, Robertson outlined that adolescent participants often identified cyberbullying as "distressful harassment with an emotional connection" (p. 108) due to there not being face-to-face interaction as in traditional bullying. Although participants acknowledged that traditional bullying can also cause emotional harm, participants felt cyberbullying was more emotional in nature, as one participant stated, "it's an emotional, more emotional than physical since it's online. But, even then, it's as strong maybe not stronger, but it can really change a person. It can affect a person" (p. 108). In this study, participants then went on to describe how cyberbullying victimization negatively impacted their lives in terms of participating and engaging in their preferred interests (e.g., carnivals and magic tricks), as well as traveling to and from school.

While individuals with ASD often experience negative consequences as a result of their bully victimization, many are able to voice coping strategies for how to deal with cyberbullies. Ko (2014) elicited various strategies for combating negative social interactions online, such as engaging in safe online behaviors (e.g., privacy settings on social media), avoiding, ignoring, or leaving a situation, relying on the support of peers, and seeking help from an adult. In Altomare et al.'s (2017) qualitative study, students with ASD pinpointed various coping strategies when faced with either traditional bullying or cyberbullying. Approach coping, or active strategies, to changing the bullying situation were identified, with the most common being telling a teacher or another adult, standing up and/or saying something to the bully, problem solving (e.g., trying to maintain peace by befriending the bully), and displaying externalizing behaviors such as getting angry, seeking revenge, and engaging in physical aggression. Avoidance coping, or passive strategies, were also identified, which most commonly included ignoring the situation and

walking or staying away. However, participants in the study also recognized that addressing

bullying situations is complex and that coping with victimization is challenging. Specifically, the

students with ASD detailed that the approach coping or avoidance coping strategies may not lead

to fruitful outcomes (e.g., telling a teacher may not do anything), or may lead to greater

consequences (e.g., reporting could make bullying worse).

Bullying and Cyberbullying Prevention and Intervention

Due to the growing prevalence of cyberbullying and its portrayal on the news and media,

parents, educators, and communities are attempting to engage in prevention and intervention

efforts. There have been advocacy efforts in favor of laws, rules, and policies that focus on

regulating the use of media for cyberbullying, designing curricular programs geared towards

educating children about safe internet and electronic media use and how to avoid or address

cyberbullying, and developing technological approaches to prevent or minimize the potential for

cyberbullying (Snakenborg et al., 2011). However, there is a lack of empirical research regarding

effective prevention and intervention strategies targeted specifically to cyberbullying

(Snakenborg et al., 2011).

While not considered "evidence-based," recommendations for intervention have been

posed. Gega (2013), for example, outlined a series of "best practices" for cyberbullying

prevention and intervention, including (a) creating a core team of trained school staff to oversee

a school's bullying prevention efforts; (b) conducting a needs assessment to determine the

prevalence of bullying within the school building; (c) creating a prevention program with key

features, such as positive school climate, mental health provider access, and ongoing

effectiveness evaluations; (d) enacting a consistent anti-bullying policy across the school and

district; (e) providing internet training for all students; and (f) providing professional

development opportunities for staff. Carrington et al. (2017) interviewed children with ASD and their parents to garner recommendations regarding bullying and cyberbullying. Students reported they would like schools to improve policies and procedures related to bullying and communicate them more clearly to students, as well as to implement support groups to develop communication and foster relationship-building. Parents also recommended that schools give harsher penalties to bullies, and voiced a desire for changes in state and federal laws related to bullying.

Given that individuals with ASD engage in frequent media use, and may be especially vulnerable to bully victimization, prevention and intervention efforts are critical. However, given that individuals with ASD are generally able to identify what cyberbullying looks like and recognize if they have been a cyberbully victim, intervention efforts should reflect that. To date, there has not been research on how students with ASD can be provided with prevention and intervention education alongside their peers as a universal design initiative. The present study aims to elicit what supports and strategies could benefit all students in cyberbully prevention and intervention, including students with ASD. The recommendations provided could assist schools in creating an anti-bullying policy and education program to be used for all students year-round.

Research Questions

The current study posed the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of bullying and cyberbullying held by current school employees?

2. What are strategies that school staff can implement to address cyberbullying prevention and intervention within the ASD population?

3. How can school personnel provide students with ASD universally designed prevention and intervention programs?

4. How confident do current school employees feel participating in cyberbullying

   prevention and intervention efforts for the ASD population?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This study was qualitative in nature, with a focus on the phenomenological approach to qualitative research. Creswell (2013) offered a number of advantages to the qualitative approach. Most notably, qualitative research allows the researcher to focus on participants' interpretations of a problem or issue rather than deriving meaning from statistics or hypothesizing meaning. Second, qualitative research allows data collection to occur within a natural setting where the presenting issue is likely to occur. Given the scarcity of prevention and intervention research with a focus on the ASD population, gathering school employees' perspectives was considered beneficial in building the research base and potentially setting the stage for future quantitative and qualitative exploration. Participants were also current school employees, which allowed for a naturalistic data collection process.

The phenomenological approach to qualitative research "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). This approach is advantageous because it allows the researcher to work with a group of participants who have shared experiences related to a problem or issue. All participants within this study shared the experience of currently working in a public school setting, allowing for them to have exposure to students with ASD and an understanding of how cyberbullying is being addressed within their school buildings.

Researcher as Instrument

Prior to engaging in phenomenological research, the researcher is encouraged to describe their personal experiences with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). As a school psychology graduate student and current practicing school psychologist, I have received training regarding, and have worked with, students with ASD. Throughout my undergraduate and graduate careers, I have actively sought out research on traditional bullying and cyberbullying. I have also sought out research about the use of social media and online means of communication, and the interpretation of messages sent online or via text. Despite this level of training and interest, I have not had the opportunity to work with students, either neurotypical or those with ASD, in the area of traditional bullying and cyberbullying. I also have only been an independent school psychologist for less than four years, so it was expected that participants who agreed to participate would have more experiences due to more years of practice.

Participants included in this study were those with whom I work closely on a day-to-day basis. This is discussed in further detail in the next section. Because I work closely with the participants in the sample, I am familiar with the student population they serve and each participant's job duties. Being a visible member of this community has its advantages and disadvantages when it comes to collecting qualitative data. First, participants may have been more open with me as a person they know and trust versus an unknown researcher. Along with that, my role is not a supervisory role, or one that allows me to have more perceived power than anyone in the sample. This could also have contributed to participants' openness when responding to questions, as their responses would not be used against them. Conversely, actively working in this community may have impacted my ability to be objective in interpreting the data.

The introduction of the peer reviewer may partially reduce this risk of potential subjectivity or bias.

Sampling and Participant Overview

For the purposes of the current study, convenience sampling was utilized. Convenience sampling allows researchers to include those who can easily be recruited and who are willing to participate in the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The sampling was considered "convenient" in that all recruited participants were those who are employed at the same special education cooperative, or who work in the same school corporation as myself. Recruiting employees from both the special education cooperative and school corporation allowed for intentional, or purposeful, sampling to occur by including individuals that represented a diverse group of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) said that purposeful sampling allows the researcher to identify or select individuals or groups that are especially knowledgeable in the area being studied.

Context of the Study

The special education cooperative is located in southern Indiana and serves four counties of school districts. These counties vary in terms of their socioeconomic status, school size, proportion of minority students, and availability of outside resources. The sizes of individual districts ranges from approximately 1400-3000 students. Employees hired by the cooperative include behavior consultants, transition consultants, educational diagnosticians, school psychologists, speech therapists and assistants, physical therapists and assistants, occupational therapists and assistants, and specialized teachers (i.e., teachers for students with an orthopedic impairment, students who are blind or low vision, students who are deaf or hard of hearing). The special education cooperative has approximately 43 employees, with some employees fulfilling

multiple job descriptions. Prior to working for the cooperative, many staff members have also worked in other school districts with roles related to education, such as special education teachers or general education teachers.

In addition to special education cooperative employees, employees within the same school corporation as myself were also recruited. These employees, which include general education teachers, special education teachers, guidance counselors, social workers, and principals, have been hired directly by the school district. The school district in which I work is considered rural, with approximately 1400 students and approximately 155 faculty and staff across all buildings. The district includes two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. There is also a private school within the district (kindergarten – 8th grade students); however, because the district and its associated school board do not hire these employees, these employees were not included in recruitment. Within the district, approximately 15.4% of the total student population is identified as having an Individualized Education Program (IEP), with 3.8% of the students in special education having an eligibility of ASD. It is unclear how many students have medical diagnoses of ASD that are not being served with an IEP, or who are served under an alternative eligibility category. When examining bullying statistics, the Department of Education counts these incidents under the heading of "safety and disciplinary incidents." Thus, it is unclear how many incidents truly involve bullying, and how many incidents involve other events. For this school district, during the 2019-2020 school year, a total of 148 safety and disciplinary incidents were reported to the Department of Education, which is 0.09% of the total incidents represented in the state of Indiana.

Sampling

Sampling procedures began once the primary investigator gained permission from Indiana State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to begin data collection. Participant recruitment took place through negotiation with the cooperative's special education director and school district's superintendent. Once the special education director and school district's superintendent agreed to allow staff to participate, an email was sent to all cooperative and school staff members asking for their participation. When utilizing the phenomenological approach, Creswell (2013) recommends 5-25 participants. The sample for this study included 10 participants, which is consistent with Creswell's recommendation.

Measures and Procedure

A semi-structured interview was utilized to address the presented research questions. A copy of the interview protocol can be found in Appendix A. All questions were open-ended and elicited information related to experience in education, understanding of traditional bullying and cyberbullying, bullying within the ASD population, current intervention and prevention efforts, and the participants' current role in bullying prevention and intervention.

The recruitment survey remained open for two weeks to allow ample opportunity for participants to sign up. In addition to asking for their interest in participating, the recruitment survey also included informed consent information. After the two week period ended, the research assistant randomly selected 10 participants from the subpopulation who completed the recruitment survey. These 10 names were then passed on to me. I contacted potential participants via email. If an individual agreed to participate, individual interviews were scheduled based on participants' availability at a mutually agreed upon location. Prior to conducting each interview, informed consent was reviewed. Participants were informed that the entirety of their interview

would be audio recorded and later transcribed for review. Both the researcher and a peer reviewer had access to the audio recordings and subsequent transcriptions. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes, ranging in length from 19 minutes and 45 seconds to 50 minutes and 29 seconds.

Analysis

Data analysis began once all interviews had been conducted and transcribed. Each transcribed interview was carefully read in order to gain as comprehensive an understanding as possible. As outlined by Creswell (2013), the phenomenological data collected as part of this study was analyzed in a way that (a) lists specific, significant statements, (b) groups statements into "meaning units" or themes, (c) provides a textural description of the theme with verbatim examples, (d) provides a structural description of how themes occurred, and, finally, (e) provides a composite description by merging the textural and structural descriptions together.

I first transcribed interviews from the audio recordings. Then, I played back the audio recording and reviewed the transcription to ensure accuracy. Once all interviews were transcribed, they were reread two times to ensure familiarity with the material collected. Statements that were similar in meaning were given a label. Labels were subsequently organized into themes. In an effort to be as systematic and organized as possible, I used a computer software specializing in qualitative research analysis called Dedoose. This software package allowed transcriptions to be uploaded, themes to be decoded and organized in a visual manner, and frequency counts to be determined for reporting purposes. Once data had been coded and organized into the qualitative research software, I asked a peer to review the data and analysis. Introducing an unbiased peer allowed for findings and themes to be confirmed, and for potential biases or assumptions of the researcher to be uncovered (Given, 2008). This peer debriefing is a

way to ensure confirmability. This peer reviewer had taken a graduate-level course in qualitative research, which ensured they were familiar with the process of qualitative research. The peer reviewer also had no experience in working with this particular school district and special education cooperative, allowing for perspective from an external source.

Creswell (2013) discussed a number of strategies researchers could employ to achieve validation of data (also known as trustworthiness), many of which I have discussed in this chapter already. Creswell (2013) recommended using at least two validation strategies when conducting qualitative research. First, by working in this same position for the last four years, I feel I have achieved prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field of interest. The author noted that this includes building trust with participants and learning the culture the participants live in and create. Next, by introducing a peer review and peer debriefing process, I allowed for an external review of my research process and line of thinking in an effort to reduce bias. Finally, I utilized triangulation, which refers to using multiple and different sources when gathering evidence. To achieve triangulation, I interviewed participants from two settings (i.e., special education cooperative and local school district) to provide as much diversity as possible. Within these populations, participants also represented a variety of positions and years of experience. This represented an example of data triangulation. Other types of triangulation, such as investigator, theory, and methodological, were not employed during this study. Limitations within the methodology of this study are discussed in further detail in chapter five.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Interviews were conducted with 10 school employees, including those who worked at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Seven out of 10 participants worked as employees at a local school corporation, located in rural southern Indiana. The remaining three participants worked as employees at the same special education cooperative as I did. Prior to beginning each interview, I reviewed the informed consent document that was sent via email during recruitment.

Participants were identified with a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. Basic demographic information about each participant is summarized in Table 1. Each participant's number of years in education was categorized based on the following scale: 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-20 years, and 21 or more years.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Job Location	Job Position	Number of Years in Education
Tyler	Male	School District	High School General Education Teacher	6-10 years
Kate	Female	School District	Title I Teacher	11-20 years
Lily	Female	School District	Elementary Social Worker	0-5 years
Tina	Female	Coop	School Psychologist	11-20 years
Hannah	Female	Coop	Behavior Consultant	0-5 years
Elaine	Female	School District	High School Special Education Teacher	21 or more years
Mya	Female	School District	Elementary General Education Teacher	11-20 years
Bridget	Female	School District	Middle School Counselor	11-20 years
Nina	Female	Coop	Diagnostician	21 or more years
Shanna	Female	School District	Elementary General Education Teacher	11-20 years

Note. Employees who worked at the special education cooperative are designated with "Coop."

Several themes emerged from participant interviews that address each of the research

questions. A summary of themes that address each research question is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of Themes

Research Question	Identified Themes
What are the perceptions of bullying and cyberbullying held by current school employees?	1. Defining traditional bullying and cyberbullying 2. Cyberbullying is harder to address than traditional bullying 3. Students may not understand what constitutes bullying
What are the strategies that school staff can implement to address cyberbullying prevention and intervention within the ASD population?	1. Building relationships with students 2. Social skills training and modeling 3. Collaboration with families and communities 4. Students with ASD may not be a target for victimization
How can students with ASD participate in universally designed prevention and intervention programs?	1. Overall school policy/vision/mission 2. Importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) and related practices 3. Recognizing ASD as a spectrum
How confident do current school employees feel with participating in cyberbullying prevention and intervention efforts for the ASD population?	1. Staff level of confidence 2. Need for professional development and more education 3. Calling in help

Perceptions of Bullying and Cyberbullying

Three themes emerged to describe participants' perceptions of traditional bullying and cyberbullying. First, participants shared their overall understanding of traditional bullying and cyberbullying. I compared these perspectives to the definitions by Smith et al. (2006). Second, participants reflected on their perception that cyberbullying is typically harder to address when compared to traditional bullying. The third theme focused on the notion that students may not be able to differentiate when an incident is considered bullying and when it is not.

Defining Traditional Bullying and Cyberbullying

Participants listed various types of traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Related to traditional bullying, participants identified physical (e.g., physically harming someone, pushing, hitting), verbal (e.g., name-calling, putting down), and social or interpersonal (e.g., extortion, exclusion, bossing others around) examples. In terms of cyberbullying, participants identified platforms including social media, text messaging, email, and cellphones. Four participants indicated that, over time, cyberbullying is perceived to be more like "traditional bullying," given its frequency and the popularity of social media. When asked about her experiences with students who have been bullied, Bridget stated, "Most of my experiences…maybe 75% of my experiences are cyber, um, digital-related."

Participants' descriptions of traditional bullying and cyberbullying were compared to Smith et al.'s (2006) definition that features whether (a) the act was aggressive/intentional, (b) the incidents were repeated or occurred over time, (c) there was an imbalance of power between bully and victim, and (d) there was use of electronic forms of contact (for cyberbullying only). Participants more frequently identified the first three elements of Smith et al.'s (2006) definition when describing traditional bullying as opposed to cyberbullying. Specifically, three out of 10 participants included aggressive/intentional in their definition of traditional bullying, while only two out of 10 participants included aggressive/intentional in their definition of cyberbullying. Four out of 10 participants included imbalance of power in their definition of traditional bullying, while only two out of 10 participants included imbalance of power in their definition of cyberbullying. Finally, six out of 10 participants included repeated/over time in their definition of traditional bullying, while only five out of 10 participants included repeated/over time in their definition of cyberbullying. Additionally, nine out of 10 participants specifically stated that

cyberbullying occurs electronically or online. As an example, Kate's definition of traditional

bullying included each of the three elements:

> Traditional bullying -- it's not just a one-off situation. The intent is to exert power over
>
> the individual to cause, you know, harm. It's to cause any type of -- stress on that person
>
> -- it can come in various forms. It can be verbal, it can be physical -- it's the intent to
>
> exert power over that person.

No participant's definition of cyberbullying included all four elements. Mya's definition

included three of the four elements: "So the use of technology, the use of social media. But

again, still needs to be intentionally targeting, repeated, behavior." Other participants' definitions

included two or fewer elements.

Cyberbullying is Harder to Address

Participants reported a few reasons why cyberbullying is harder to address than

traditional bullying. Primarily, participants noted that incidents occur outside of school. This

presents many difficulties, as school staff are not able to monitor students closely, intervene

when needed, or set appropriate consequences. Shanna briefly described an incident that

occurred on social media, and shared that she needed to call the parents because it was "outside

my job hours environment." Regardless of whether parents intervene or not, cyberbullying

incidents often impact students' interactions in the school setting, which creates a lot of tension,

as noted by Bridget. In other words, cyberbullying incidents often carry over into students'

conversations and social interactions at school, even if the situation occurred outside of school

hours.

School staff reported feeling somewhat limited in terms of what they could do about

cyberbullying when instances occurred outside of school. Tina noted that "principals struggle

with how to deal with those types of instances." She mentioned principals may struggle with

intervening in cyberbullying for two main reasons: the incidents are happening on students'

devices outside of school, and the bullying is occurring on platforms that are not utilized,

monitored, or accessible by school staff within the building. Mya and Nina discussed the policy

of alerting outside agencies, such as a school resource officer, law enforcement agency, or

juvenile court when incidents occurred outside the school. Nina further elaborated about some of

the limitations these agencies have:

> I do know that often with the cyberbullying, in my experience, it's turned over to the
>
> police. And you know, a lot of times, sometimes it was turned over to juvenile courts if
>
> there are photos or, you know, things involved, but I think even at that level, I don't
>
> know that they can do much about it. I know phones are confiscated and taken away,
>
> Chromebooks are taken away, you know those things, you're on lockdown, but when you
>
> go home, then you have access to it.

Nina also pointed out how cyberbullying was a bigger issue when students were able to bring

their own devices to school. When students brought their own devices to school to use in the

classroom, it was much harder for schools to monitor students' online behavior and intervene in

potential situations. That has seemingly gotten better now that schools are providing students

with devices to use both at home and at school during the academic year. Nina stated:

> Back in the day, when we first started all these devices, the kids could bring their own
>
> device to school and hook up to our Wi-Fi. So they had access to everything; nothing was
>
> blocked. So it was just a mess because the kids would say, "So-and-so looked this up."
>
> There's no way for us to track that. And, and they were blaming each other for things.
>
> There was a lot of, you know, parents saying, "This kid took my kid's phone and did this.

My kid didn't do that," and there was no way to trace it. So I think that has gotten better.

But it's still, um, a huge issue.

Now that students have access to various devices at home, participants noted some parent education about the technology would be beneficial. Nina mentioned that information and reminders that the devices can still be considered school property, even when hooked up to home Wi-Fi networks, would be helpful. She noted that she did not get this information as a parent when her children were sent home with devices. Shanna mentioned that parents would benefit from information about what apps are out there and what technology students are using. She said, "I think parents don't know how to parent because they're trying to parent how they were at that age, and it's not like that."

Not Understanding Bullying

Five participants discussed how students commonly mislabel instances of bullying. Students may report incidents as bullying, even if they do not meet the criteria outlined by Smith et al. (2006). One hypothesis for this, as posed by Kate, is that the word "bully" has become a catchall phrase for students' negative peer behavior. She said:

The word bully is almost become a buzzword. For kids that you just, you know, don't get along. Um and so, "Well they're bullying me," and it's like, "No they -- they -- they don't like you or they don't want to hang around with you," and it's the behaviors are not intended to exert power, to change something, type thing. It's just, you know, they're not nice to me; they don't want to play with me at recess.

Kate further stated that often the go-to explanation for poor behavior is that a student is being bullied. When asked for clarification, Kate stated that both students and parents seem to quickly report that a child is being bullied as a means to explain a behavior (e.g., students or parents

identify they are being bullied as an explanation for not following school rules). She said oftentimes, it is a misinterpretation of a social cue or social situation, as opposed to a true bullying incident. Hannah also described how everyday social situations could incorrectly be interpreted as bullying incidents. Specifically:

> I've had quite a few [students] that I worked with where the example of bullying that they were using was being followed or being imitated by peers. But when they were being followed, they were in line to go to the cafeteria, and so the whole class was in line. Or they would go play at recess and they would end up on the same, on the same playground equipment as the peer that was "bullying" them.

At the middle school level, Bridget discussed how students often struggle to work through conflict resolution. Instead of thinking rationally about a situation, students often report bullying over a rather minute, singular event. Bridget walked through the problem solving process during her interview:

> Sometimes we just have conflict and we don't know how to work through conflict resolution. So it, it varies in the approach. I'll have some kids say they're being bullied and they'll say someone is mean to me because they told me to shut up. You know, and so we have to talk about, you know, well that person didn't really act appropriately but that's not actually bullying. So, if it's, if it is a repeated thing, or someone is just not being nice, a lot of times I'll address it with that person that's not being nice and say, you know, "Did this happen, did you say this?" "Yes." "Ok, well was that nice?" "No." And how can they handle it or deal with it differently. But I also do a lot of working with the victim, so to speak, and um, self-esteem and self-confidence. And learning how to not let those things totally affect you and continue all the time.

Strategies to Address Cyberbullying Within the ASD Population

Three strategies emerged in terms of addressing cyberbullying. First, participants talked about the benefits of building relationships with students. Second, participants talked about the use of social skills training and what that might entail for students with ASD. Third, participants discussed the importance of collaborating with families and community partners.

Building Relationships With Students

Participants talked about how building relationships with students is important in establishing an authentic connection. Students who have access to a trusted staff member are more likely to report bullying, or to be more honest about their involvement in bullying situations. Shanna talked about laying the groundwork in relationship-building prior to a bullying event taking place:

> My experience with students who have been cyberbullied [is that] it carries over into the classroom. And then, as I said prior to this, when we start having those conversations of who said what. And you really get down to the root of it, you know, you really have to dig. And that's why it's so important to have those strong relationships with the kids, so they know they feel safe and comfortable and they don't lie. Like, they really tell you the truth. Because really, as a teacher, you're really trying to help solve [the problem]. And at first I think they're scared they're gonna get in trouble. So after we get to the root of it, um, then, I've found, that sometimes that it has started at home from text messages or media. And we talk about it.

A limitation that participants from the special education cooperative talked about is that their role makes it challenging to build relationships with students. Because they are assigned to different buildings, and often act more as consultants than teachers, it is more challenging to build long-

lasting relationships with students. Staff from the special education cooperative are open to building relationships, and often want to build relationships, but are aware of their limitations. Tina highlighted this problem:

>My current role is that the administration will come to me and talk to me about their ideas. And, I'm available if they're, I'm kind of a safe person that if somebody wants to develop a relationship in order to have another person within the building, however I'm not in every building every day, so I'm just kind of an extra person that is available to help share information and find resources when they're, when they're needed. I don't generally directly participate in the instruction.

Social Skills Training and Modeling

Six out of the 10 participants discussed, to some degree, how social skills training, modeling, and/or role playing could be beneficial when addressing bullying and cyberbullying. Participants said that, generally, students get more out of lessons and concepts when they can actively practice them, as opposed to sitting and listening in a classroom. Hannah described how this could look:

>I think any kind of, like, social skills training [would be beneficial] ---videos, role playing, uh, you know, all that kind of stuff I think would be, any kind of interactive hands-on practice. Not just sitting and talking about scenarios. But actually seeing, you know, a video of something and then discussing it and then acting out, you know, what what would you do if someone came up to you and said this? And again, not just doing that with individuals with autism present, but after they got comfortable with it and more of an inclusive environment as part of that school wide intervention.

Nina further talked about how social skills training could be individualized for students with ASD:

> I think there needs to be more for work with students on social skills. On relating with peers. There needs to be more modeling, there needs to be more opportunities for them to interact besides just sitting in a classroom and sitting next to somebody. You know, that I think that would be a great way for kids to learn how to advocate for themselves. I think, you know, some peer support for kids. I feel like, I feel like a lot of my kids with autism that were pretty successful had social friends and, and were included in a lot of groups. It's because their group was aware of that student's needs and would support them. And I think that, you know, that peer group also has to support that child when it comes to cyberbullying, to have somebody to reach out so their friends can say, "This is not acceptable," or bring that to school to show that, you know, this is happening.

Tina also elaborated on how social skills training could be targeted for individuals with ASD:

> We work a lot on, you know, how do you enter conversation, how do you exit a conversation. I think also, you know, what is appropriate for, how is it appropriate for, what does appropriate treatment look like, what do boundaries look like. I think there needs to be some training in regard to, to those things as well. And not just within the group setting, but then more applied with a kind of a support system observing from a, a distance, and that gradual release of responsibility. To remain in the area as a coach so that they can follow up, or intervene if needed, in, in less structured settings, be that in maybe the cafeteria, or, you know, on unstructured outings or things like that, that involve groups of people. I think, I think we need to take it from just the small, homogenous group and, and branch out.

Tina also talked about the correlation between school culture and social skills training. She stated that making social skills training a priority is an important pillar in school culture.

Collaboration With Families and Communities

It was generally the practice for participants to contact parents if bullying or cyberbullying was reported to them. Participants indicated that they contacted both the parents of the victim and the parents of the bully to help foster a sense of communication and teamwork. However, some participants expressed frustration at the lack of parental response, including Lily, who said, "I think a lot of our parents don't understand the severity of bullying and cyberbullying. I mean we hear a lot of, 'Oh, kids are just being kids,' 'Boys are just being boys.' I think education is really important."

Parental education was also discussed by other participants. Given that students are exposed to a lot of different types of technology, participants suggested that parents may not know all of what is occurring online. Nina remarked:

> [It would be beneficial to be] educating parents on what apps are out there that these kids are using that are inappropriate. What back ways [hacks or work-arounds] are these kids using things. When you hear these kids saying in the third grade, "I'm using Snapchat," that ruffles my feathers 'cause I'm thinking, uh, that's not always so safe. But I don't think parents are aware of that. So maybe more resources for parents as well would be good.

When focusing specifically on students with ASD, participants highlighted the importance of communicating with parents in order to get to know the student and the family on a deeper level. Parents of students with ASD may be able to provide school staff with different information, or

suggestions about how to interact or communicate with their children. Tyler talked about the

benefits of a collaborative relationship with parents:

> [With students without ASD, I] can have a conversation. I feel like I can get, have a
>
> pretty good understanding of their background or how they are feeling. You know, how
>
> to emote, and all of that. With the students I've had that have had autism, you know, they
>
> have a little bit more of a struggle understanding, you know, exactly why and how, and
>
> how, and what the solution is. And so, I would think in that situation, I would want a
>
> [parent] present. I would want to talk with the parents to see what the background is.
>
> Because I don't know if I would be able to get the same information from the student
>
> themselves, if that makes sense.

In addition to Tyler, Shanna also mentioned that she likes to communicate with parents who have

students with ASD. She indicated that parents can give a good idea how to communicate with

their children, what they like, and what is unique to their IEPs.

Participants talked about how community resources have been used in the past to provide

bullying and cyberbullying instruction. Elaine mentioned that group speakers have historically

presented more about safe online behavior and online predators, as opposed to conducting

prevention and intervention education. Other participants talked about community partners, such

as Crisis Connection and the D.A.R.E. program, and how they have been used to provide

bullying and cyberbullying instruction. Although the D.A.R.E. program serves primarily as a

substance abuse prevention program, participants noted that there is a brief discussion about

bullying within their curriculum. Lily said that it can be difficult to find community partners in

their small town:

I'm somewhat limited in the outside resources that we can offer. I do like to try to

provide those services but we do not have many around here, as far as outside groups or

things that they can attend.

Students With ASD May not Be Targets for Victimization

Although participants generally agreed that students with ASD may be more likely to be

victims of bullying, four participants mentioned that students with ASD were not typically

targeted. Mya reflected on one of her previous students, and attributed his non-victimization to

his personality: "I did have an autistic boy several years ago. But he was so fun, that the kids

loved him. So, the last thing they ever would've done was seem, like, to bully him. 'Cause he

was so fun." However, Mya and some other teachers admitted to not having a lot of students

with ASD over the course of their careers.

Nina also went into some detail about her experience with students with ASD not

necessarily being targets for victimization:

I have really not seen any bullying of students that I would consider more profound

disabilities, such as severe autism or, you know, Down Syndrome, or students that are

really high needs. And in my experience I have not seen that. I've seen kids be the

opposite, and be more of a caretaker.

Nina's response suggests that students with more obvious disabilities may not be targets for

victimization. She later went on to say that students with ASD who are considered higher

functioning would likely be victimized more due to them not fitting in socially. Kate said that the

elementary-aged students were generally compassionate towards individuals with disabilities.

Students With ASD Participating in Universally Designed Intervention Programs

Three ideas emerged as potential elements to consider when implementing universally designed intervention programs for traditional bullying and cyberbullying. First, participants talked about creating a school policy, vision, or mission that makes universally designed intervention a priority. Second, participants shared how implementing research-based strategies such as social-emotional learning (SEL) and other related frameworks could be beneficial. Third, participants called attention to the idea that ASD represents a spectrum of students and needs, and, subsequently, that instruction may need to be tailored based on a student's ability level.

Overall School Policy/Vision/Mission

Participants discussed the importance of schools incorporating bullying prevention and intervention into their school vision or school culture. Having a single unified vision assists with creating a positive school culture. Shanna praised her school's team collaboration. Note, the name of Shanna's school has been provided with a pseudonym:

> I think, as a team here at Indiana Elementary, every adult works to educate the child and how we treat each other. And, we're not just academics here at Indiana Elementary, we're the whole child, and I think that's what makes Indiana Elementary really special. You know, whether I see a kindergartener or a fifth grader, if something's happening, we are going to intervene, let the teacher know. We just, literally, are one big family here.

Having a familial-type system allows for multiple staff members to build relationships with students, as well as having consistent expectations throughout the school building. Shanna did not describe whether this was an official policy; it appeared to be more school culture based on years of nurturing. When implementing policies, Nina reviewed the importance of top-down style leadership:

I think that has to come from your corporation and administrative, you know, top down. That this school is a safe school. This school is, it has to be buy-in from the teachers, or else they're not going to implement any program or, you know, try to carry out any of those, uh, strategies or interventions. So I think the buy-in has to be from top down.

Nina later went on to describe what types of policies would be beneficial for administrators to enforce. One important theme was encouraging staff to listen to students, so that students do not become too discouraged to report incidents, or believe that staff do not believe or care about what they have to say. Nina also talked about educating young students about appropriate social media use, given that they have access to technology during the elementary school years.

Having a consistent vision or school mission also helps with increasing efficacy of interventions. Hannah talked about a bullying education program that she found to be beneficial:

I've seen one program that I thought was really effective and it was a schoolwide program. It wasn't just, you know, proactive and these are the steps, and reactive, this is how we deal with it. But it was like an everyday there were exercises and practices on, um, not just on bullying, but what we do instead. You know, we build each other up, we support each other, we have a problem, we do this. And it was daily, um, a daily thing. But I think other than that one example, I think that most school programs fall way short of being, of having an actual impact on the bullying itself.

Importance of SEL and Related Practices

Only the three participants employed by the local special education cooperative talked about what I interpreted to be research-based practices. The practices that were referenced included social-emotional learning (SEL) and restorative practices. The benefit of SEL instruction is that it enhances students' capacity to integrate cognition, affect, and behavior to

deal effectively with situations and challenges in their everyday lives (Weissberg et al., 2015).

The five tenets of SEL are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship

skills, and responsible decision-making. Nina mentioned that many schools are utilizing SEL,

and conceptualized it as building relationships with others and collaboratively working through

problems. She said,

> I think that there is a lot of schools using, like, SEL right now, the social-emotional
>
> learning. I think they're implementing that, and if more of that would be implemented, I
>
> think that would also help. I think, you know, getting your counselors more involved to
>
> allow kids to come with problems and try to help address and solve them, instead of the
>
> teacher just calling the parent and saying, "Your kid said this or did this."

Also mentioned was the importance of restorative practices. Passarella (2017) stated that

restorative practices is an umbrella term for a variety of techniques aimed towards ongoing

communication and reparative opportunities. He referenced some desired outcomes that come

out of restorative practices, including (a) accountability, community safety, and competency

development; (b) reduction in racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline; (c) reversal of the

negative academic effects of zero tolerance school discipline policies; and (d) reduction in

contact between police and students on school discipline issues. Tina said that she has observed

restorative practices being integrated into a school's programming, and has also observed

restorative practices that were not being integrated into a school's programming. Tina talked

about what this looked like at an elementary level:

> I've seen mostly more PBIS [Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports] and more
>
> culture types of large group, "this is our expectation of how we treat each other," and
>
> trying to set a positive climate in the school. I've seen some more individualized in pieces

where students involved at the elementary level, I haven't seen as much at the middle or high school level. At the elementary level, some of that restorative bring the students together, think about how this action affected the other person, doing a think sheet with the principal or similarly trusted staff member and working through that before confronting the other person. And then, they also work on a lot on, self-calming kinds of techniques so that they can employ those before a meeting between the students.

Hannah also shared her experiences with observing restorative practices between students. She mentioned that restorative practices can be done in a group setting as restorative circles. Hannah referred to restorative circles when talking about how she would benefit from additional training before having to lead one independently with students.

Tina also talked about conscious discipline at the whole school level. Conscious discipline is a licensed program that encourages individuals to take ownership of their feelings by embracing conflict (Bailey, 2000). Conflict is welcomed as an opportunity to develop problem-solving skills and eliminate previous misconceptions about situations and behaviors. Although Tina did not describe conscious discipline in this way, she described the importance of applying it as a whole school:

> The schools I'm in use a lot of conscious discipline. And that's again more of a school climate that they build in rituals and routines to help try and build connections among students to make them feel part of the group and, and belonging. To increase those feelings as kind of a preemptive strike against people trying to make people feel left out, and that's just not what our culture does.

Recognizing ASD as a Spectrum

Six of the 10 participants pointed out, to some degree, that ASD includes a broad

spectrum of needs based on students' ability levels. Students with ASD may have differences in

cognitive skills, expressive and receptive language skills, and social skills when compared to

their neurotypical peers; however, the degree of said differences varies across students. Nina and

Kate highlighted that students with ASD who are higher functioning (i.e., previously labeled as

having Asperger's syndrome) are typically more likely to be targets for victimization, as lower

functioning students may not have the skills to understand the social construct of bullying or, in

relation to cyberbullying, how to access social media. Kate stated:

> There's such a wide spectrum. You've got some students---one particular student that I'm
>
> thinking of, that we've had. She is now at the high school. Cognitively, she would have
>
> no understanding of being bullied, or social media platforms. I mean, cognitively, it's just
>
> not there. And then we've got some kids that are, they do have the diagnosis of autism
>
> and they would be very much aware if they were being mocked or those things.

Although participants generally thought it was a good idea for students with ASD to participate

in universally designed programs, some did state that instruction may have to be tailored to fit

students' needs. As Tina said, "I don't want to put all people with the autism spectrum disorder as

having the same needs." They indicated that instruction may need to be adjusted based on the

students' cognitive abilities, specific social skill deficits, and amount of time needed to grasp the

lesson. Elaine talked about how cognitive ability and language skills would greatly drive the

effectiveness of bullying education programs:

> I think it might depend on the reasoning ability level or logic level. Like what's the best
>
> way to instruct them, like what's the best thing to tell them and the best way to advise

them, you know. Like, do they understand? It kind of depends on their ability level,

especially the verbal, verbal ability, and receptive and expressive language.

Elaine later went on to say that bullying education programs may be more beneficial for students

if materials were offered at different levels. That way, instruction could be individualized for all

students. Hannah mentioned that students with ASD may need additional practice, but would still

benefit from participating in bullying education programs:

> I think it's really important for individuals with autism to be exposed to [universally
>
> designed instruction] as well. Knowing that they might need additional, not all of them,
>
> but some of them might need additional support in order to get the same, the same results
>
> as somebody without autism would possibly get. But I think you definitely, it's, it's
>
> highly important to expose them to it in the same way that you would the general
>
> population. And then, just keep in mind that there might be additional pieces that you
>
> might have to follow up on to make it more effective.

Confidence in Prevention and Intervention Efforts With Students With ASD

Three themes emerged to describe participants' confidence in prevention and intervention

efforts with students with ASD. First, participants shared their confidence levels in working with

students who said they were either victims or perpetrators of bullying or cyberbullying. Second,

participants discussed the need for more professional development and more education about

traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Third, participants stated that calling in additional people

during prevention and intervention efforts would be beneficial. This included people within the

school building, as well as various community resources.

Staff Level of Confidence

Participants were asked how confident they would feel working with neurotypical students and students with ASD who were either victims or perpetrators of bullying or cyberbullying. In general, participants discussed being most comfortable working with a neurotypical student who expressed they were a victim of bullying or cyberbullying. Some participants, including Bridget, Shanna, and Kate, indicated they would feel confident enough to handle the situation independently. As Kate said, "It's one of those things where I've taught for a long time and I have kids of my own. So, I know, that lends a lot to--um--to having those tools." Other participants said that they would feel confident in helping students find resources or assistance, as opposed to handling the situation entirely independently. Tyler shared:

> And I think, you know, in the past, I've had a lot of students willing to come by my room after school, before school, or whatever it is. I've had a lot of conversations like that even if it's not about bullying, and so all kinds of life issues and things. I feel completely comfortable in that issue. Like I said, I feel completely comfortable going to the professionals who also work here. I don't feel confident in handling it myself but I feel confident in having that conversation to start and then the next steps to have others help as well.

Hannah mirrored this statement, as she said, "I would feel confident that I could get them to somebody who could help them. But I don't feel confident that I could be the only one helping them through that process. I would need support myself."

Nina mentioned that one of the challenges of her role is that she is assigned to multiple school buildings. She felt more confident about addressing bullying and cyberbullying incidents in her previous jobs where she was a general education teacher or a special education teacher.

This allowed her to have a set group of students with whom she could build relationships. Within her current role as diagnostician, it is more challenging to build relationships with the students due to working in multiple buildings and being in more of a consulting role, as opposed to working directly with students routinely.

There was more variability in participant responses when asked about students with ASD. Some participants, including Elaine, Shanna, and Bridget, indicated they would be just as confident addressing bullying and cyberbullying victimization and perpetration with students with ASD. Other participants indicated they would feel similarly confident finding additional resources and supports for neurotypical students and students with ASD. Two participants, Lily and Mya, indicated they did not feel as confident in addressing bullying and cyberbullying with students with ASD. Mya stated she felt "not real confident," while Lily provided a more detailed explanation:

> [I do not feel] as comfortable, I am not very educated in working with someone with autism. And I'm not sure I would be qualified for that. I would try, I would give it my hardest. But I don't know that I would be able to provide what they need.

Some participants indicated they would have the greatest difficulty, or unfamiliarity, when working with students with ASD who said they are bullying others traditionally or electronically. Kate could not imagine a student with ASD identifying themselves as a bully, as she commented, "That doesn't even seem possible." Participants mentioned that the social or communication deficits that are associated with ASD could make it challenging to intervene with a student who is bullying others. Elaine elaborated on this by saying,

> That would definitely be the hardest I think because, I think, depending on the level and, I guess, knowing why they're doing it. I'm confident at being comfortable at working

with them and being willing to work with them. I'm not sure how confident I am in getting through to them or how successful I would be on it. But again, it depends on the verbal level and, you know, why is this going on. Is it because they were victims themselves? It is because, like a habit? The only way they know how to interact? [I don't know] what [would be] some good social replacement behaviors.

Need for Professional Development and More Education

Participants discussed the need for more professional development and education opportunities. Mya discussed the importance of "proper training, and not just a quick PowerPoint video that you have to check through." She would like to see more hands-on training, as opposed to training that is only offered online. She mentioned that teachers have to complete training before each school year about topics such as blood borne pathogens and fire safety, but it is not always effective. Mya said that since the training is the same each year, it is easy to not pay attention to it or write it off as not important. Lily also mentioned that hands-on training would be beneficial, as she said, "I'm very hands-on and I like to see how things are done. So working with someone to train me [would help me feel more confident]."

Participants recognized that branded curricula are not being used to provide bullying and cyberbullying instruction. School staff stated that they rely on community resources, such as Crisis Connection and D.A.R.E., to provide such instruction. However, the limitations to these resources are that community partners only come into the school for a short amount of time. The instruction typically occurs over the course of a few weeks, but then it is up to school staff to address issues as they arise. Additionally, Crisis Connection and D.A.R.E. review a number of different topics, so it is likely that students are not getting extensive instruction in the areas of bullying and cyberbullying prevention and intervention.

Some participants expressed that having a branded curriculum on bullying and cyberbullying would be useful to have. One benefit was stated by Bridget: "if I had a set program that I would follow, it would help remind me [of information] and it would give me resources and things I could use." Lily also expressed that a packaged program could be beneficial so that students get instruction throughout the year:

If we were able to offer different programs, more than just once a year, I think that would be good. I would really like to see maybe once in the beginning, once in the middle, and once in the end of the year. Especially with all the students going on summer break.

Other participants expressed hesitation about the use of branded curriculums. Nina and Hannah questioned whether a branded curriculum would be beneficial to students with ASD. Hannah specifically stated, "I find that bullying education programs, um, have great intentions, but I think they fall short. Way short. I think there's a lot of talk and a lot of visuals but I don't think there's a lot of teaching." Another hesitation, as expressed by Shanna, was that teachers simply do not have the time to implement a structured curriculum. She stated:

I think if we have the program. You know, teachers are pretty strapped with time and everything else that they have to teach. I don't think you would have to encourage us, because we all know it's a need. I just think it would be more of a time factor.

Calling in Help

Participants discussed how calling for other adults to help them could assist with addressing traditional bullying and cyberbullying incidents. Having another set of eyes and ears on the situation helped participants feel more confident in addressing the student's needs and making the right decision. Kate reported:

Once [an incident is] reported to me, then we talk with our administrator and our social

worker, and it would be discussed with them. Then we need to decide whether or not our

resource officer needs to be involved as well. And at that point, it becomes their

responsibility to see that things are taken care of.

Other participants also specifically mentioned pulling in a counselor or a social worker. Shanna

described that involving student services personnel could help a student feel supported and help

the student build a relationship with another staff member in the building. Shanna also elaborated

on how a counselor's role had looked different in her building in the past:

We have a social worker and not a school counselor. So this year, we haven't had the

benefits of someone coming into the classroom outside of me and speaking to them about

it. I speak about it, usually when issues arise. When we had the counselor, she would

come in once a week, it was amazing. It was perfect because it was somebody besides my

voice--because they start to tune me out--and she was soft spoken, and she would educate

the kids, and she would not only talk about bullying, but she would talk about other

character traits, you know, and topics that needed to be addressed.

Throughout her interview, Shanna shared a number of benefits with having a counselor come in

regularly in the classrooms. First, it gave students an opportunity to hear other perspectives, and

messages presented in a different way from another person. Second, it gave teachers an

opportunity to learn new material, or also hear material presented in a different way. Third, it

allowed students to build a relationship with another staff member in the building besides their

teacher, with whom they could speak if problems arose. Besides regularly coming into the

classroom, Shanna did not talk about differences between having a school counselor versus a

social worker. Lily did acknowledge her limitations as a school social worker. She stated, "I

would try and meet with the student myself, but I'm only the social worker so I can only do so much. So it would be nice to have someone who would be qualified to help in that aspect."

Participants named a few individuals on whom they could rely for help. The most common person was the counselor or social worker, followed by an administrator. Other staff included the student's special education teacher, a school psychologist, or a behavior consultant. These people are often described as experts in working with students with ASD, or experts in dealing with bullying incidents. As Mya said, "If I had the bully come to me, then I would want to probably pull in [the social worker] to, I mean that's what she specializes in, so that's what I would want to use her [for]." Nina discussed the importance of involving a person with whom the student already has a relationship:

> Their teacher should be involved and that teacher should know that student...their personality. And that, maybe it's the janitor, maybe that student has a connection with, whoever the student connects with in the building, you would start there. And, if that student doesn't connect with anybody, let's brainstorm who can we start to get in place that the student might trust that they could have conversations with to support. Or, you know, obviously the counselor or social worker should be involved and might have more knowledge of the programs or interventions that the school's using.

Summary of Findings

In summary, participants here knew much less about cyberbullying than traditional bullying, and felt less equipped to handle occurrences of cyberbullying. When considering how to address cyberbullying with students with ASD, participants emphasized building relationships with students as well as social skills training, modeling, and building collaborative relationships with families and community partners. There was also recognition that community resources

may be limited in rural areas similar to the one in this study. While participants recognized that students with ASD generally might be victimized more frequently, their experiences were the opposite in that students with ASD had not been targeted as bully victims. Participants also showed a lack of knowledge regarding branded curriculums and of how their district is currently providing anti-bullying instruction. Finally, participants in this study were mixed in their confidence in reacting to instances of bullying and cyberbullying. Generally, participants expressed more confidence when asked to intervene with a neurotypical student as opposed to one with ASD.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore current educators' experiences with traditional bullying and

cyberbullying prevention and intervention. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences

in these areas when working with neurotypical students and students with ASD. Four research

questions provided the framework for this study: (a) What are the perceptions of bullying and

cyberbullying held by current school employees? (b) What are strategies that school staff can

implement to address cyberbullying prevention and intervention within the ASD population? (c)

How can students with ASD participate in universally designed prevention and intervention

programs? and (d) How confident do current school employees feel participating in

cyberbullying prevention and intervention efforts for the ASD population? Among the most

notable findings, participants reported an adequate understanding of traditional bullying and

cyberbullying, but are not as familiar with prevention and intervention programs. Instead,

participants discussed strategies or techniques that could be utilized for a variety of issues within

the school setting. When focusing specifically on students with ASD, some participants

expressed lower levels of confidence when intervening in instances of bullying or cyberbullying.

Additionally, although participants acknowledged that ASD represents a continuum of

severity and needs, participants generally expressed more familiarity with students on the "lower

end" of the autism spectrum as opposed to higher functioning individuals who previously would have been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome.

Major Findings

Unfamiliarity With Prevention and Intervention Programs

Participants expressed familiarity with various ways traditional bullying and cyberbullying could manifest themselves. In other words, participants listed physical, verbal, and social or interpersonal examples of traditional bullying, and identified social media, text messaging, email, and cellphones as ways cyberbullying could occur. When focusing on the tenets of Smith et al.'s (2006) definition, participants were more successful when defining traditional bullying as opposed to cyberbullying. This could imply that educators are more familiar with traditional bullying, or may have clearer references of what fits the definition of traditional bullying. In other words, it would likely be easier for educators to witness instances of traditional bullying as opposed to cyberbullying that occurs digitally or online and out of direct eyesight of a teacher. School staff may require specific examples of how various cyberbullying acts includes elements of imbalance of power, intentionality, and repetition.

A greater familiarity with traditional bullying was also reported by Campbell et al. (2019). Those researchers focused on both teachers' and parents' ability to accurately identify traditional bullying and cyberbullying scenarios. When presented with scenarios, teachers correctly identified traditional bullying more often than parents, but no significant differences existed for teachers and parents in correctly identifying cyberbullying. Campbell et al. (2019) posed that this could be due to teachers being exposed to traditional bullying more frequently, since traditional bullying predominantly takes place at school. This was also supported by the

participants in this study, who expressed that it is often difficult to identify cyberbullying when many incidents occur outside of school.

Although participants were familiar with traditional bullying and cyberbullying, most were not familiar with branded programs or curricula intended for bullying prevention and intervention. None of the participants in this study named a published curriculum with which they were familiar, that they have used in the past, or that they are currently using. Instead, some participants discussed utilizing community resources (i.e., Crisis Connection, D.A.R.E.) to deliver education to students. Other participants explained how they provided sporadic instruction to bullies and victims on an "as needed" basis. Some participants also stated they did not play a major role in delivering prevention and intervention instruction.

Adopting an anti-bullying program or curriculum has both strengths and limitations. Verseveld et al. (2019) found a number of benefits for implementing a schoolwide anti-bullying program based on their meta-analysis. First, implementation of an anti-bullying program has a positive effect on determinants of behavior teachers' responsiveness to bullying behavior in the school setting. Second, an anti-bullying program can increase teachers' self-perceived abilities to intervene in bullying situations. Third, teachers' knowledge about bullying also improves with the introduction of an anti-bullying program. Despite these benefits, a major drawback to adopting universal anti-bullying programs is the mixed research on their effectiveness. A meta-analysis conducted by Yeager et al. (2015) determined that, with the implementation of an anti-bullying program, bullying is most effectively prevented in Grades 7 and below, but it is not successfully prevented in Grades 8-12. This is concerning because of the prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying among older adolescents. Other studies (e.g., Andreou et al., 2008; Ttofi & Farrington, 2009) recognized that anti-bullying programs can be effective, but not to a large

degree. Ttofi and Farrington (2009) specifically reported that bullying and victimization was reduced by 20-23% in schools where an anti-bullying program was deployed. Andreou et al. (2008) further reported that, although a curriculum-based anti-bullying program produced favorable short-term outcomes, these did not carry over into the long-term.

Adopting SEL curriculum can have positive effects for students with disabilities. Research conducted by Espelage et al. (2015) focused on a three-year trial period for the Second Step: Student Success Through Prevention (SS-SSTP) program with middle school students with disabilities. Results found that students in the experimental group showed a significant decline in their bullying perpetration, but there was not a significant reduction in their bullying victimization. A related study (Espelage et al., 2016), which also focused on the SS-SSTP program with middle school students with disabilities, found that students in the experimental group reported greater willingness to intervene in bullying situations, and received higher grades, than those in the control group. Although these studies did not focus specifically on students with ASD, results are promising and demonstrate that branded curriculums can have positive effects with students with disabilities.

Use of Best Practices Strategies for Bullying and Cyberbullying Prevention and Intervention

Instead of using an anti-bullying program or curriculum, participants discussed many "best practices" strategies for addressing traditional bullying and cyberbullying. These strategies included conducting social skills training, building relationships between students and families, adopting an overall school policy or vision, and integrating SEL, restorative practices, and conscious discipline.

The American Psychological Association (VandenBos, 2007) defined social skills training as,

> a form of individual or group therapy for those who need to overcome social inhibition or ineffectiveness. It uses many techniques for teaching effective social interaction in specific situations (e.g., job interviews, dating), including assertiveness training and behavioral and cognitive rehearsal.

Social skills training serves four purposes: (a) promoting skill acquisition, (b) enhancing skill performance, (c) removing or reducing competing problem behaviors, and (d) facilitating generalization and maintenance of prosocial behaviors (Gresham, 2002). These four objectives could be beneficial for all students, including those with ASD who demonstrate deficits in social skills. However, the research regarding effectiveness of social skills training in addressing bullying and cyberbullying is mixed. In a systematic review conducted by Vreeman and Carroll (2007), three of the four social skills training studies that were reviewed showed no clear improvement in bullying. The one study that reported social skills training was effective showed decreased aggression based on peer- and self-reporting. Similarly, a literature review by Silva et al. (2017) found that two of the five social skills training studies reviewed resulted in significant decreases in aggressive behaviors. Keeping this in mind, school staff may wish to implement other strategies alongside social skills training in order to maximize reductions in bullying and cyberbullying.

Although socials skills training may lead to mixed results in reducing instances of bullying, another strategy that could be considered is relationship building. Building strong relationships between students and school staff has a number of benefits, including improving students' motivation to learn, academic engagement, social skills, and behavior (The Education

Trust & MDRC, 2021). Positive student-teacher relationships also have proven effective in addressing bullying. Wang et al. (2015) determined that middle-school-aged students were less likely to act as bully perpetrators if they had secure bonds and positive relationships with their teachers. It is also important for teachers to build strong bonds with students in order to mitigate potential consequences of bullying. Specifically, Huang et al. (2018) reported that bully victims who have poorer relationships with their teachers experienced a heightened risk for symptoms associated with depression. The authors also suggested that bullies and bully victims generally have the poorest relationships with teachers, so teachers may need to work harder and more consistently to build relationships with these students. Although participants in this study talked about the importance of building relationships with students, strong relationships did not appear to serve as a mitigating factor in responding to bullying and cyberbullying incidents. Specifically, general education teachers in this sample indicated the least amount of confidence when asked how comfortable they would be in intervening in instances of bullying and cyberbullying involving students with ASD. General education teachers should arguably have the strongest relationships with their students when compared to other staff members, as most students spend typically spend the majority of their school day in the general education classroom. School staff are encouraged to reflect on the quality of their relationships that they have with all students, but particularly with those diagnosed with ASD. Staff are also encouraged to consider how they can be the most effective in handling bullying and cyberbullying incidents, even if they do not feel they have the strongest relationship to the student(s) involved.

Having strong, collaborative relationships between the school and families can also lead to positive outcomes. Specifically, school staff and families could come together to discuss instances of concern, brainstorm problem-solving strategies, and develop an action plan for

moving forward in addressing future behaviors. Related specifically to bullying, Lester et al.

(2017) stated that parents can act as a positive influence by modeling positive social behavior,

offering their children advice about how to handle bullying situations, and encouraging their

children to seek help if they are victims. Addressing bullying across both the home and school

settings is crucial for long-term problem resolution. When looking to resolve instances of

cyberbullying, both families and school staff should work collaboratively in monitoring

technology use, modeling appropriate online and face-to-face behavior, and applying

consequences to bullies when needed. Although it is not guaranteed that these efforts would

result in long-term changes, it is hoped that collaboration between families and schools would

result in safer online behavior and fewer reports of victimization. Students may need help with

resolving conflict in order to repair relationships, or with dissolving relationships in order to

protect themselves from future occurrences of victimization.

Participants in the present study discussed the importance of schools incorporating

bullying prevention and intervention into their school vision or school culture. Jerald (2006)

emphasized that a positive culture is achieved through creating a positive vision for both students

and staff. To build strength in the school culture, staff need to ensure that values are consistent

and aligned across all aspects of a student's day and educational journey (Jerald, 2006). A strong

school culture that is consistent and universally aligned is often driven and reinforced by the

administrator. School culture can be applied to a number of aspects of a school's operating

system, including bullying. Li et al. (2017) investigated the importance of bullying prevention

and prevention leadership. The authors found that principals' bullying prevention leadership was

positively correlated with teachers' psychological ownership of their school's anti-bullying

mission. The authors asserted that the climate driven by principals' leadership helps teachers

identify the importance of bullying prevention and learn what behaviors are expected, rewarded, or discouraged in managing bullying.

The final theme participants in the present study discussed was incorporating building-wide techniques such as SEL, restorative practices, and conscious discipline. These themes were highlighted only by individuals employed by the special education cooperative, which could suggest that educators within the sample school district may not be as familiar with these programs and initiatives. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL; 2021) website highlights a number of benefits to incorporating SEL across the school building. Research suggests that SEL practices improve students' academic performance, increase students' ability to cope with emotions (e.g., stress, depression, anxiety), and strengthen students' attitudes about themselves, others, and school (CASEL, 2021). Related to bullying, SEL instruction can assist students with identifying prosocial responses, developing problem-solving skills, learning coping skills when faced with interpersonal conflict, and acquiring specific skills, such as assertiveness and emotion management (Smith & Low, 2013).

The restorative practices model focuses on repairing damaged relationships after a conflict has occurred. This can be used for a number of situations, including bullying. Rigby (2014) outlined how restorative practice can be applied when addressing bullying. To begin, victims express to the bully how they felt during the incident. The bully is asked to reflect on what they were thinking at the time, what they are thinking in the present moment, and how they will act restoratively to repair the situation. However, Rigby (2014) acknowledged that the bully may not be authentic in their restorative efforts, or the victim may not view the restorative suggestion as acceptable.

Finally, conscious discipline, as discussed previously, encourages participants to embrace and work through conflict in order to solve problems (Bailey, 2000). Conscious discipline is very similar to restorative practices in its intent. Conscious discipline could be applied to bullying situations by encouraging bullies and victims to confront challenging situations and develop skills such as conflict resolution, assertiveness, and emotion regulation. Adult-led discussion and reflection period between the bullies and victims immediately after a situation arises may facilitate the resolution process.

Lack of Experience With Students With ASD

Students with ASD were of particular focus during this study. Although participants generally agreed that students with ASD would be more likely to be victims of bullying, some participants voiced that students with ASD were not typically targeted in their schools. Furthermore, some participants described students with ASD in a way that, although it was not explicitly stated, led me to believe they were describing students who would be considered lower functioning. This could suggest that this sample had more experience with students who had more severe symptoms associated with a diagnosis of ASD, or that lower functioning students with ASD were more easily identifiable to the participants. In other words, participants in the sample may have intuitively thought of students with more overt characteristics of ASD (e.g., repetitive speech, significant delays in social communication) as opposed to those who were higher functioning. It should be noted that the majority of individuals with ASD (45%) present with average to above average IQ, whereas only 25% present with a comorbid intellectual disability (Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 2020). Therefore, the reports of participants in this sample may not have adequately captured educators' experiences with a typical array of students across the ASD spectrum.

Some participants expressed lower levels of confidence when intervening in instances of bullying or cyberbullying if the situation included a student with ASD. One participant, a school social worker, clearly stated that she had a lack of training or qualifications in working directly with students with ASD, while others expressed more skill in finding additional resources and supports instead of intervening directly. Participants who expressed some level of confidence when working directly with students with ASD involved in bullying and cyberbullying included a special education teacher (21+ years of experience), an elementary Title I teacher (11-20 years of experience), a school psychologist (11-20 years of experience), and a school counselor (11-20 years of experience). As noted, these participants were those with the most experience in education and did not include educators who worked within the general education setting. Some other participants indicated mixed levels of confidence. For instance, the behavior consultant indicated that she felt confident in working with students with ASD, but did not feel confident in knowing how to intervene in instances of bullying or cyberbullying without the assistance of another adult. Also, the educational diagnostician (who previously served as a special education teacher) indicated that she was more confident in her abilities when she worked more directly with students on a consistent basis. In her current role as an educational diagnostician, she viewed her lack of relationship building opportunities with students to be a barrier in intervening in instances of bullying and cyberbullying.

The feeling of a lack of preparedness or training when working with students with ASD is not uncommon across the literature. Morrier et al. (2011) reported that fewer than 15% of teachers receive training in autism from teacher preparation courses during college. Hendricks (2011) focused on self-reported knowledge of ASD in special education teachers within six areas of proficiency: (a) general autism, (b) individualization and support strategies, (c)

communication, (d) social skills, (e) behavior, and (f) sensory motor development. Overall, when all domains were averaged together, special education teachers self-reported "low knowledge" in working with students with ASD. Closer examination of the domains found that general autism, behavior, and individualization fell within the "intermediate knowledge" range, whereas communication, social skills, and sensory motor fell within the "low knowledge" range (Hendricks, 2011). Perhaps if teacher education included more instruction about symptoms, needs, and best practices in education for students with ASD, teachers would feel more confident intervening during instances of bullying or cyberbullying.

District Understanding of Bullying and Cyberbullying

Although not one of the major themes of this study, I consider it relevant to reflect on the staff's seeming lack of understanding of bullying and cyberbullying law and policy. Only one of the participants referenced the school's anti-bullying policy, but did not provide details about what the policy includes or where to access it. Another participant, Mya, was unaware that anti-bullying instruction is mandated. When I asked how school staff could be encouraged to implement universally designed bullying instruction, she responded with:

> I mean, honestly, I think it should almost come from the state in a sense. Kind of how we have to do like suicide prevention training. It should be a, I mean, I don't even know I've watched eight million of those videos in the beginning of the year. I don't know if that's one of the videos we watch or not. I don't feel like it is.

When I told Mya that Indiana law requires instruction in bullying prevention and intervention by October 15, she followed up by asking, "This last year we just had? Or like coming up?" I replied that this law has been in place for a while. Mya asked who was supposed to deliver instruction, and I replied that it could be a number of school staff members. Mya mentioned the

community partner, Crisis Connection, and how her school likely contracts with that agency "to [check] our box." She elaborated by saying "I'm sure it's not just our school, it's every school I'm sure. It checks a box. Like you bring that in, well, we did it so we can check that box." In other words, Mya indicated that the anti-bullying instruction may fit the bare minimum definition so it can meet state standards, but may not be comprehensive or engaging.

Implications for Practice

Based on the experiences of participants in the present study, some recommendations are offered for consideration. First, many of the participants expressed the desire for professional development opportunities. On a broader level, professional development could cover the defining features of ASD, identification of students with ASD, and how students with ASD present with a spectrum of needs and abilities. Education about the differences between neurotypical students and students with higher functioning ASD could be advantageous.

When considering professional development about ASD, a number of professionals could be involved so that the training is as comprehensive as possible. The school psychologist could review the diagnostic criteria for ASD and the evaluation process for identifying a student with ASD in the school setting. The school psychologist could also assist teachers with developing effective behavior strategies based on individual students' needs and preferences. For instance, if the student with ASD has a strong interest in animals, the school psychologist could provide examples of a visual schedule that incorporates animals and a behavior intervention plan involving animals. In addition to the school psychologist, a student's special education teacher could provide training on what types of services they can provide for students with ASD and how they handle specific behaviors or problem scenarios. General education teachers and support staff could then direct questions about specific students to the special education teacher

in an effort to brainstorm and ensure consistency across both the general education classroom and the resource room. If a student receives services from an outside agency (e.g., applied behavior analysis therapist or occupational therapist), outside providers could assist with discussing individual students' needs and goals during therapy. Training could also focus on equipping support staff (e.g., classroom assistants, counselors, social workers) with knowledge and resources about how to handle problem behaviors and how to support a student's individualized goals. When focusing on participants from this study, educators with the least amount of experience and general education teachers would appear to benefit the most from comprehensive professional development.

The request for more professional development in the area of ASD is not uncommon. Focus groups led by Corkum et al. (2014) determined that educators needed professional development across the board, ranging from general information on ASD to specifics regarding program development and implementation. Educators requested multiple sessions of professional development, paired with direct, hands-on coaching and mentoring when it comes to learning about educational programming for students with ASD. Coaching was also noted to be the most effective professional development strategy for teachers working in rural communities with students with ASD (Mueller & Brewer, 2013). For educators within the sample school district in the present study, an option could be to receive hands-on professional development opportunities from behavior consultants within the special education cooperative. For employees within the special education cooperative, coaching opportunities would need to be explored.

A second implication for practice is the need for schools to have a consistent vision and action plan for bullying and cyberbullying prevention and intervention. The action plan should be widely accessible and consistent across a school corporation. This action plan would also

need to be widely communicated to consultants (i.e., special education cooperative members) so

that they could execute the plan when intervening in instances of bullying and cyberbullying.

Only one out of the 10 participants in this study made mention of corporation policy as it related

to handling bullying and cyberbullying incidents. This could suggest that not all educators were

familiar with the corporation's policy, or they may not have known where to find the

information.

Presently, Indiana has a number of laws and policies addressing anti-bullying efforts in

school settings. Stopbullying.gov (2021) provided an overview of anti-bullying components that

are addressed over 13 total codes. The 13 laws and regulations include the following

components:

- a statement emphasizing that bullying is prohibited

- a definition of bullying and cyberbullying

- an understanding that anti-bullying laws can cover off-campus incidents

- specific policy requirements for schools to prevent and respond to bullying
  behavior

- an outline of how schools will provide research-based instruction in bully
  prevention

- an overview of how districts must provide training to school staff and volunteers
  in prevention and reporting policy

- guidelines for providing safeguards or mental health supports for students
  involved with bullying

- plans to involve parents in efforts to address bullying behavior

Indiana law does not include protections for specific groups; rather, the laws are designed to protect all students equally. When reviewing other states' anti-bullying laws in conjunction with an observational study, Hatzenbuehler et al. (2015) determined that states which had a statement of scope, a description of prohibited behaviors, and requirements for school districts to develop and implement local policies reliably decreased bullying and cyberbullying. Fortunately, Indiana law includes all three of these elements; however, this is not true for all states.

When reviewing the three student handbooks from the school district in this sample (i.e., elementary level, middle school level, high school level), the anti-bullying policies outlined in each handbook were consistent. None of the participants in the study mentioned that anti-bullying policies can be found in student handbooks, indicting a potential lack of awareness thereof. When focusing on the components introduced by Stopbullying.gov (2021) referenced previously, observations are captured in Table 3.

Table 3

Review of Student Handbooks

Anti-Bullying Regulation	Student Handbook Discussion
Statement emphasizing that bullying is prohibited	Each handbook provides a statement that bullying is "strictly prohibited"
Definition of bullying and cyberbullying	Each handbook defines bullying. Each definition includes that bullying can occur electronically or digitally to capture cyberbullying
Understanding that anti-bullying laws can cover off-campus incidents	Each handbook states that the anti-bullying policy applies regardless of the physical location of where the bullying incident took place
Specific policy requirements for schools to prevent and respond to bullying behavior	Each handbook outlines who is responsible for responding to bullying incidents. The staff member listed varies across building levels, but includes a principal, assistant principal, or designee
Outline of how schools will provide research-based instruction in bully prevention	Each handbook states that schools are "encouraged" to have "meaningful discussions" with students, staff, and families about the negative effects of bullying. There is no discussion of how schools will provide research-based instruction in preventing bullying
Overview of how districts must provide training to school staff and volunteers in prevention and reporting policy	Each handbook mentions that volunteers may be required to receive state mandated bullying training "depending on the level of interaction [they have] with students." There is no discussion of how school staff will be provided training about prevention and reporting policy; however, there is note that staff will face disciplinary action if they do not report or investigate bullying reports or incidents
Guidelines for providing safeguards or mental health supports for students involved with bullying	Each handbook highlights that counselors and other community resources will be used to support bully victims. Counseling may also be a recommendation for the bully, as well as corrective discipline or a referral to law enforcement
Plans to involve parents in efforts to address bullying behavior	Each handbook states that "educational outreach and training" will be provided to parents. No further discussion about the details of this training is provided.

When comparing the school district's anti-bullying policy to the standards provided by Stopbullying.gov (2021), each component is addressed; however, improvements could be made. More discussion is needed about how research-based instruction will be provided to students, how staff will be provided training in responding to bullying incidents, and how parents are involved in addressing bullying behavior. Further longitudinal research would be needed to determine if bullying and cyberbullying reports decreased upon drafting a more detailed and expansive anti-bullying policy.

In addition to modifying the existing anti-bullying plan, administrators may wish to consider what else can be added to make the plan more comprehensive. In this school district, every student is given an electronic device (e.g., Chromebook) to be used across both home and school settings. Given that students are being provided with devices that can be used at all times of the day, the likelihood of students engaging in inappropriate online behavior arguably increases. The existing anti-bullying policy found in the student handbooks does not discuss what types of education students are provided to combat this. To my knowledge, students are not provided education on appropriate social media use, on Internet safety, and on overall digital literacy. Staff may wish to consider implementing some of these elements into their anti-bullying curriculum in an effort to decrease behaviors associated with cyberbullying and increase behaviors associated with academic integrity and readiness.

Reflecting back on the statement from Mya, who indicated she was not aware of the law pertaining to bullying education, there is suggestion that this particular district may view anti-bullying education as unimportant. To corroborate that, staff in this school district do not use a branded curriculum to provide their instruction, and seemed unaware of programs that are available for use. Attitude was mixed on whether a branded curriculum should be employed. For

this district in particular, it is recommended that administrators implement a careful analysis of how they are meeting the requirements for providing students with anti-bullying instruction. They are encouraged to reflect on the sources of instruction, the quality of instruction, and ways to make staff more knowledgeable of current regulations.

Redmond et al. (2020) offered a cyberbullying conceptual framework that can be applied to corporation policy and easily expanded to include traditional bullying as well. The three facets of the framework include identification, management, and prevention. The identification component could address attributes of cyberbullying, knowledge of the types of cyberbullying, identifying student awareness of cyberbullying, and identifying educators' perspectives of cyberbullying. The management component could address the role and the responsibility of the school and individual educators when handling cyberbullying incidents. The prevention component could focus on the role and responsibility of the school and individual educators when preventing cyberbullying incidents, and the expectation for teacher education programs as it relates to awareness of cyberbullying and its effects.

Another implication for practice from this study is the need to consider the advantages of a curriculum that incorporates universal design elements. Participants in this study expressed that a published, scripted curriculum could be beneficial, as none of the participants indicated they currently have access to one. Although Indiana code does not demand that a district needs to use a branded curriculum, the law does mandate that instruction be "age appropriate" and "research based" (Bullying Prevention Student Instruction Act, 2015). Having access to a scripted curriculum would allow teachers and other implementers to have quick access to resources and materials. This would alleviate some stress of developing lessons, creating materials, and knowing the correct things to say when bullying or cyberbullying situations arise. Participants

also discussed that a universally designed curriculum incorporating all students would be beneficial, but specified that some students may require follow-up lessons presented to them at their level. In other words, some students may require more instruction and intervention outside the universally designed setup. When conceptualizing this as a multi-tiered system of supports, schools could provide all students with the same instruction from the selected curriculum at the Tier 1 level. Then, students who may need more individualized instruction could be re-taught or provided with supplemental materials in a small group (Tier 2) or one-on-one (Tier 3) setting. A challenge to implementing a published curriculum could be finding an affordable curriculum that fits a corporation's needs and also has research-based standards and outcomes. Due to the lack of evidence-based programs available, districts would be advised to identify and monitor the outcomes they hope to target as they implement a new curriculum.

A final implication for this study is the need to consider the role and educators' perspectives of a school psychologist. Only two participants out of the 10 (i.e., the school social worker and Title I teacher) mentioned that they would call upon the school psychologist for assistance with bullying and cyberbullying incidents when working with students with ASD. This could be due to the structure of the special education cooperative, which assigns school psychologists to multiple buildings. In other words, a school psychologist may not be a person that comes to mind as a resource, since they are not seen in each school building on a daily basis. Furthermore, participants may not be aware of the training and the knowledge that school psychologists possess regarding counseling and behavioral intervention. A large part of the job of a school psychologist is psychometric testing and report writing, while social workers and counselors spend substantially more time with counseling (Agresta, 2004). However, school psychologists are trained in a number of different areas, including data collection and analysis;

consultation and collaboration; mental and behavioral health; crisis preparedness, response, and recovery; and cultural competence and diversity (National Association of School Psychologists, 2020). This lack of understanding could be addressed through professional development to inform school staff about the various roles school psychologists could fill. In addition, to create more of a balance between psychometric testing and other responsibilities, districts may wish to examine the need for additional school psychologists, or the need for more educational diagnosticians to assist with the psychometric testing required for evaluations.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study was phenomenological in design, meaning that it "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). However, generalizability of findings should be approached with caution, as participants in this study only represent educators within a specific region in southern Indiana. The views and experiences presented by this study's participants may not represent the views and experiences held by other educators across the country. A rich description of the context for this study has been provided in an effort to help consumers determine the relevance of these findings to other contexts. Additional studies are needed to determine whether similar themes emerge among educators with wider ranges of experiences and from a larger geographic region.

Similarly, educators' experiences while working within this specific region could also be viewed as a limitation. Participants who work for this school district frequently voiced that they did not have large amounts of experience working with students with ASD. This could be due to the district being located in a small, rural area, where individuals with ASD are not as prevalent as those in a more densely populated area. It could also indicate that participants are thinking of

individuals with ASD with more severe needs as opposed to their higher functioning counterparts. Additional studies with participants that have more experience in working with students across the entire range of the autism spectrum, or within a community with a higher population of students with ASD, could be advantageous. When considering ideas for future research, including more participants from this particular district and special education cooperative or including participants from other school districts and special education agencies could allow for more thorough data triangulation since a greater number of perspectives would be recorded. Additionally, future studies could benefit from more specific inclusion criteria to allow for richer discussion based on participant's experience. For example, inclusion criteria could focus on individuals who have experience working directly with students with ASD, individuals who have dealt directly with bullying and cyberbullying incidents, and individuals who meet a cutoff for years of experience (e.g., five years or more in education).

Working within a small rural area also presents challenges when it comes to community resources. Participants who work for the local school district discussed the limitations within their community and school buildings, including the lack of community partners and the need for specialized counselors. The lack of community partners and specialized counselors results in educators feeling somewhat limited in what they can do to address bullying and cyberbullying within their school buildings. Investigation into the role of community partners in other areas, at both the state and national levels, could help determine whether geographic area may have been a contributing factor to participant limitations in addressing bullying and cyberbullying. Additional exploration of the strengths and drawbacks of having a school counselor, compared to a social worker, could help schools determine what resource would best fit their building's needs.

Methodological Limitations

Some limitations in methods and research practices also need to be addressed. One limitation, as discussed previously, could be data triangulation. Because I utilized convenience sampling, the pool of potential participants was quite narrow. While convenience sampling has its advantages, in this study, it did not allow for a variety of perspectives (i.e., those from other districts or areas) to be included. Additionally, although I met Creswell's (2013) recommended number of validation, or credibility, strategies, one that I did not utilize was member checking. Member checking, or participant validation, is where data or results are returned to participants to check for accuracy (Birt et al., 2016). During data collection and analysis procedures on this study, member checking was not completed. I did not use member checking because I guaranteed participants that they would not have any future obligation to my study upon completion of their interview. Additionally, although member checking can be a useful tool in verifying participants' views and meanings, it also allows for an opportunity for participants to change responses in an effort to appear more knowledgeable or professional. Thus, in an effort to preserve participants' time and to maintain the integrity of the data that was initially collected, member checking was not completed. Additionally, although I used Dedoose to assist with developing a coding scheme, a document or written record (e.g., journal) was not used during the peer review process. Although the use of Dedoose can be considered satisfactory, having a written record would have provided stronger evidence of the confirmability of these findings.

Conclusion

Today's educators need to be prepared to address instances of bullying and cyberbullying within their schools. All students are at risk for victimization, but one population that could be more at risk is students with ASD. This study was aimed at understanding educators'

perspectives on bullying and cyberbullying prevention and intervention efforts within their school buildings. Overall, participants did not express strong familiarity with published prevention and intervention programs for bullying and cyberbullying. Instead, participants shared more familiarity with relationship building and building-wide initiatives, such as SEL. When working with students with ASD, some participants expressed lower levels of confidence when intervening in bullying situations. Ongoing professional development, paired with more concrete expectations for bullying education, could be advantageous.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What is your current job?

   a. What types of students do you currently serve? What ages?

   b. Has your role changed since you have been hired? How?

   c. What other experiences have you had within the education field? Explain.

   d. How long have you been in education?

2. Tell me about your understanding of traditional bullying.

3. Tell me about your understanding of cyberbullying.

4. Tell me about your experience with students who have been bullied. Tell me about your experience with students who have been cyberbullied.

   a. How did you respond?

5. What is your familiarity with traditional bullying and cyberbullying within the Autism Spectrum Disorder population?

   a. If you do not have much experience in working with students with ASD who have been bullied or cyberbullied, do you think they would be more likely or less likely to be targets for victimization? Explain.

   b. How do you think traditional bullying and cyberbullying are the same when comparing students with ASD and students without ASD? How are they different?

   c. Tell me about your experience with bullying education programs.

6. To your knowledge, what efforts are being taken in your school buildings to address traditional bullying and cyberbullying?

   a. How can your schools improve their efforts in preventing and intervening in instances of traditional bullying and cyberbullying?

7. How can your schools improve in addressing traditional bullying and cyberbullying within the ASD population? Schools as a whole?

   a. What intervention strategies do you think would be most beneficial? Least beneficial?

8. How is traditional bullying and cyberbullying instruction presented to students?

   a. How frequently are they addressed within a given school year?

   b. How can bullying instruction be improved in your schools?

9. Tell me your thoughts on students with ASD participating in universally designed prevention and intervention programs for all types of bullying.

10. How can school staff be encouraged to implement universally designed bullying instruction?

11. What is your current role in participating in traditional bullying and cyberbullying prevention and intervention?

12. Within your current job position, are you encouraged to participate in bullying prevention and intervention? Explain.

13. How would you feel about incorporating bullying prevention and intervention into your current job duties?

14. What would make you more confident in participating in bullying prevention and intervention efforts?

15. How do you feel about working with students who express they are a victim of traditional bullying and/or cyberbullying? How confident are you in working with these students?

    a.   What would assist you in engaging with said student?

16. How do you feel about working with students who express they have bullied others within a traditional framework and/or electronically? How confident are you in working with these students?

    a.   What would assist you in engaging with said student?

17. How do you feel about working with a student on the Autism Spectrum who expresses they are a victim of traditional bullying and/or cyberbullying? How confident are you in working with this type of student?

    a.   What would assist you in engaging with said student?

18. How do you feel about working with a student on the Autism Spectrum who expresses they have bullied others within a traditional framework and/or electronically? How confident are you in working with this type of student?

    a.   What would assist you in engaging with said student?