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Elizabeth Jean Zacher
School Counselor
Perspectives on Bullying
Behavior in Urban Middle
School Settings

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined middle school counselors' perspectives of bullying behavior as it occurred in their respective school environments. This exploratory study was conducted with 12 respondents who are current middle school counselors with at least three years of experience working in their school settings. Respondents were recruited from a variety of middle school settings including public, private, and charter school environments in the New York City area using a snowball sampling method. Participation in the study included answering a demographic questionnaire and engaging in a face-to-face taped interview that included questions about definitions of bullying, school setting, bullying incidents, characteristics of students labeled as bullies and victims, and counselors' experience and training.

The study's findings demonstrated that bullying behavior not only presents itself differently in different school environments, but that there were great variations in the ways counselors described how their schools responded to bullying behavior. Significantly, respondents discussed the changing nature of bullying behavior due to technological advances, that allow for youth to interact in ways that were not available to them in previous generations. Implications suggest that there is a need for further research that continues to focus on the perspective of middle school counselors and the multiple environmental contexts in which bullying occurs. Implications for social work practice include acknowledging the instrumental role that social workers can play in

creating and implementing effective anti-bullying interventions in schools by planning and coordinating the involvement of representatives from multiple environmental contexts. Key representatives include parents/guardians, teachers, school administrators, community leaders, and policy makers.

SCHOOL COUNSELOR PERSPECTIVES ON BULLYING BEHAVIOR IN URBAN
MIDDLE SCHOOL SETTINGS

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work

Elizabeth Jean Zacher

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2009

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in schools has become recognized as one of the most pervasive problems in schools across cultures (Smith, et al., 1999 as cited in Nicolaidis, 2002), and one that is of particular interest to social workers who are working in school settings and with school aged children who deal with the impacts of having been bullied, as well as those who are displaying bullying behavior themselves. Though there has been some research on the causes and effects of bullying, the effectiveness of school bullying intervention programs, and perspectives of children, teachers, parents and administrators on bullying, there is surprisingly little research on school counselors' perceptions of bullying even though the counselor role is integral in addressing the effects of bullying. There is even less research on how different school environments affect the prevalence of different types of bullying such as physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying. Much of the current research fails to adequately distinguish these different types of bullying. Many studies have been conducted in the UK and Australia, but there is a lack of research on bullying and antibullying intervention programs in the U.S. With research from other countries pointing to how interventions by school personnel are one of the most important protective factors against bullying behavior, this researcher would argue that more studies that examine counselors' own perceptions about bullying in their respective school environments would be useful to fully understand the environmental contexts in which bullying can occur.

This exploratory study was conducted with 12 respondents who are current middle school counselors with at least 3 years of experience working in their school settings. Respondents were recruited from a variety of middle school settings in the New York City area, including public middle schools, private middle schools, and charter middle schools. Efforts were made to represent cultural, linguistic, racial, and gender diversity, along with neighborhood diversity to reflect the different socioeconomic levels that are prevalent in the respective schools. Although the sample size represented a small group of 12 respondents and the generalizability of the study is limited, it is this researchers hope that it will spark further questions and research about the crucial role counselors play in discouraging bullying behavior, and how school setting and can reflect differences in the prevalence of different types of bullying.

Media reports of school tragedies like the mass shootings at Columbine High School and Red Lake High School make connections between the violence of the perpetrators and their histories of being bullied. Most recently the tragic suicides of 11 year olds Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover in Springfield, MA and Jaheem Herrera in Atlanta, GA after being victims of bullying have made media headlines and shed light on the issue of bullying. It is essential for the social work field to be well informed about the bullying phenomenon and the social and environmental contexts in which bullying occurs. There is more diversity within the school systems in the United States than in other countries where bullying has been researched and interventions planned. In addition, violence is more prevalent in the United States than in other industrialized countries where government programs provide more public assistance for health care and education and firearms are illegal. Although antibullying intervention models in other countries can be

useful, it is essential to take into account differences in the school systems and the cultural diversity of the populations present in the United States. With more emphasis being placed on collaborations between schools, families, and mental health agencies, research also needs to take a more holistic approach to its treatment of bullying, taking all social and environmental contexts into account.

This thesis is organized in five chapters, including the Introduction, the Literature Review, the Methodology, the Findings, and the Discussion. This Introduction chapter has presented the problem, purpose, and rationale for the study. The Literature Review chapter presents a review of current research on bullying, and includes a discussion about theoretical frameworks, definitions of the term "bullying," consequences of bullying behavior, different types of bullying, and early adolescent development. The Literature Review chapter then moves into an analysis of literature pertaining to protecting and contributing factors to bullying behavior, policies related to school bullying, perspectives and attitudes about school bullying, antibullying intervention programs, and the role of school counselors in addressing bullying behavior. Next the Methodology chapter describes methods of research, selection of respondents, data collection, and data analysis procedures used in the study. The Findings chapter presents the findings of the research, organized by themes, and will provide a general description of respondents. Finally the Discussion chapter presents a summary of the findings in relation to current research, offer this researcher's perspective about the limitations of the study, and offer suggestions for future research on the topic of bullying.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews literature on the school bullying phenomenon by presenting a review of current research in order to provide background support and context for this topic. It begins by exploring the theoretical frameworks that have been used to understand the bullying phenomenon, and thereafter focuses on ecological systems framework and the social development model as comprehensive theoretical frameworks from which to examine bullying behavior. An analysis of the term "bullying" as it is commonly understood by other researchers provides a working definition of the term, allowing for further exploration of the different types of bullying that occur in schools along with statistics on the frequency of bullying in the school environment. An examination of current research on adolescent development and peer relationships sets the framework for the specific middle school environment that is the focus of this study. A review of research that points out some of the causes and effects of school bullying will highlight some factors that contribute to bullying behaviors and factors that protect against bullying behavior, with a special sensitivity to racial/ethnic and sexual orientation differences that should be taken into consideration in the socialization process.

Research analyzing policies and legislation in the United States for families and children that have an impact on frequency of bullying and school violence are cited. Studies are noted which point out differences in the way key players such as parents,

teachers, administrators, and children define bullying and how these definitions can be instrumental in developing an effective anti-bullying school policy. Research on some current solutions to school bullying shed light on some of the challenges of creating anti-bullying programs in the United States that are effective. Finally the role of school counselors is examined with current research on counselors' perceptions of school bullying and their responses to the phenomenon of school bullying.

This chapter is divided into the following sections: theoretical frameworks, definitions of school bullying, consequences of bullying behavior, types of bullying, early adolescent development, research in other countries, factors that contribute to bullying behavior, factors that protect against bullying behavior, development of policies related to school bullying, perspectives and attitudes about school bullying, antibullying intervention programs, and role of school counselors.

Theoretical Frameworks

There have been a number of theories used to explain aggression in youth, many of which are also applicable to bullying behavior. Orpinas and Horne (2006) give an overview of these theories, breaking them down into intrapersonal, interpersonal, developmental, and macro levels. The following section explores theoretical frameworks that have been used to understand aggressive behavior in children and includes the following subsections: intrapersonal theories, interpersonal theories, developmental theories, and macro level theories.

Intrapersonal Theories

On the intrapersonal or individual level, attribution theories and social information-processing models have been used to explain bullying behavior.

“Attribution refers to causal explanations that individuals generate to explain their own behaviors and the behaviors of those around them” (Orpinas & Horne, 2006 p. 59). In a study conducted by Dodge (1980), aggressive attributional bias was explored by creating the same scenario for both aggressive and non-aggressive children. In this scenario, a peer destroyed their work on purpose (hostile intent), by accident in an effort to help (benign intent), or for no apparent reason (ambiguous intent). Dodge (1980) found that both aggressive and non-aggressive children responded with aggression when the action by their peer was thought to be hostile or benign, but that in ambiguous situations non-aggressive students responded benignly and aggressive students responded aggressively. Social information-processing models pose that several cognitive steps explain children's social behavior and aggression, including encoding social cues, interpretation of those cues, formulation of a goal, response access, and response decision (Crick & Dodge, 1994). When a child misinterprets a social cue, he/she may act aggressively when it is not warranted. This model works in stages, and can be beneficial for bullying interventionists in that each of the cognitive stages can be targeted in the intervention (Orpinas & Horne, 2006).

Interpersonal Theories

Social-cognitive theory and attachment theory are theoretical constructs that have been used to explain aggression and bullying behavior on the interpersonal level, where children interact with peers, family members, and other important figures (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). Social-cognitive theory is complex and addresses multiple social and personal influences on behavior to explain aggression using five main constructs that include: reciprocal determinism, social learning of aggression, rewards and punishment,

the social environment, and personal cognitions (Bandura, 1973, 1986). This theory emphasizes the influence of the family through modeling, rewards, and punishments (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). In contrast, attachment theory focuses on the importance of the quality of the relationship between child and caregiver during infancy and early childhood (Shaw & Bell, 1993) and establishes the foundation for future relationships because the child expects other adults to follow patterns consistent with those of early primary caregivers (Bowlby, 1982). According to this theory, aggression could emerge for several reasons, including as a reaction to a frustrating relationship with a primary caregiver, in an effort to attract attention of neglectful caregivers, or as a result of anxious or insecure attachment to a caregiver (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). Much of the bullying research done in other countries has used attachment theory as a basis for explaining these behaviors. Intervention programs based on this theory may be useful in providing support for parents and/or utilize mentoring by other supportive adult role models who act as parental substitutes (Orpinas & Horne, 2006), but largely ignore other social and environmental factors that may play into bullying behavior.

Developmental Theories

The developmental level includes an individual's interactions with systems outside of the one-on-one relationships with caregivers, peers, and other adults. Orpinas and Horne (2006) cite family systems theory, social interactional model, and developmental pathways to violence as constructs that are used to explain bullying and aggression on this level. Family systems theory divides families into subsystems (e.g., the parental subsystem, the offspring subsystem, the marital subsystem), where the family is seen as a unit composed of many interconnecting relationships (Bowen, 1985). In this

framework, when a child is displaying bullying behavior, it is a symptom of a conflictual relationship in one or more of the family subsystems; therefore interventions must target the entire family system. The social interactional model focuses on risk factors along a developmental trajectory from birth through adolescence. This model poses that children are born with innate characteristics that influence development, and that when a child is born with a difficult temperament this can lead to more adversarial parent-child interactions (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). According to this model, children may become more aggressive because of an adverse relationship with parents and this can lead to conduct problems, failure to develop social skills, and turning to peers who experience the similar troubles. This model also takes into account family and community risk factors, which may influence a child's propensity towards aggression. Interventions based on the social interactional model can alleviate negative influences the child experiences at each point along the process of the development of aggression (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). Developmental pathways to violence emerged from a number of longitudinal studies that followed children into adolescence and adulthood and have indicated that the development of youth aggression follows two distinct trajectories: the early-onset group and the late-onset group (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). One caution of this model is that it has mostly focused on the development of aggression in males and researchers therefore have cautioned that these trajectories cannot be generalized for females. Understanding the developmental pathways to violence is important in the recognition that not all aggressive children are identified as aggressive in childhood, but since violence is not distinguished from bullying behavior in this model, more research should be done on pathways of bullying specifically (Orpinas & Horne, 2006).

Macro Level Theories

The following section explores the macro level theories that were used to contextualize research in this study. It is divided into two subsections: ecological-systems theory and social development model.

Ecological-Systems Theory

First coined by Bronfenbrenner (1979), ecological-systems theory provides a useful and comprehensive macro framework in order to conceptualize the bullying phenomenon, which is used throughout this study. “Ecological-systems theory purports that all individuals are part of interrelated systems that locate the individual at the center and move out from the center to include all systems that affect the individual” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979 as cited by Swearer & Espelage, 2004, p. 3). Individuals involved in bullying may be a bully, bully-victim, victim, or bystander. Bullying behavior does not occur in isolation, but rather is “encouraged and/or inhibited as a result of the complex relationships between the individual, family, peer group, school, community, and culture” (Swearer & Espelage, 2004, p. 3). Some of the previous research on bullying focuses on just one system such as family or peer group as the main cause of an individual to engage in bullying, bully-victim, victim, or bystander behavior. Although much of this research has been useful in furthering our understanding about the underlying causes of the bullying phenomenon and childhood aggression in general, this researcher would argue that to ignore the complete context of an individual, including the micro and macro systems in which the individual moves throughout life, is to ignore an important piece of the puzzle. The ecological-systems theory allows for exploration of the individual in context and holistic interventions that can effectively target these

multiple contexts. The ecological-systems theory is particularly useful in prevention of bullying in that programs that are designed to increase students' social competence, for example, are much less likely to be effective in a school environment that is not a supportive environment (Orpinas & Horne, 2006).

Social Development Model

In addition to the ecological-systems theory, the social development model is useful in explaining how the relationship between an individual and others can influence bullying behavior. According to Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon (2000, p. 326), "etiologiical perspectives on aggression have progressed from the view of aggression as an innate characteristic in all humans to the more recent conception that aggression reflects some degree of learning from our surroundings. From a social learning perspective, Bandura (1973, 1986) argued that the external environment contributes, in large part, to acquiring and maintaining aggression." The social development model, like the ecological-systems theory, is based on the position that individuals do not engage in aggressive behavior in isolation from their environments. "An integration of control theory (Hirschi, 1969) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1973), the social development model emphasizes the role of bonding to family, school, and peers as a protection against the development of conduct problems, school misbehavior, truancy, and drug abuse (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992). Like the ecological-systems theory, the social development model explores the multiple social contexts of the individual. This model has been used by researchers such as Catalano and Hawkins (1996) and Herrenkohl, et al. (2003) to examine both protective factors and risk factors that determine how and why some individuals are at a higher risk of developing antisocial

behavior than others. This perspective poses that “behaviors formed in childhood set a foundation for future socializing experiences, which, in turn, promote (or, likewise, work against) the continuation of antisocial behavior into adolescence” (Herrenkohl et al., 2003, p. 180).

Definitions of School Bullying

There are many definitions of bullying, but in general most agree "bullying is defined as physical, psychological, and/or verbal intimidation or attack that is meant to cause distress and/or harm to an intended victim" (Christie-Mizell, 2003, p. 237). Not all research agrees which characteristics are necessary to define a bullying act, but many agree that the three most crucial elements to bullying include repetition, harm, and unequal power (Berger, 2007). Dan Olweus, who began researching bullying in Scandinavia in the 1970s and has published extensive research on bullying stated that bullying can be defined when a student is exposed repeatedly over time to negative actions by one or more students (Strabstein, Berkeman, & Pyntikova, 2007). Research that defines bullying excludes one time attacks, teasing between friends, and play fighting in their definitions, but includes indirect attacks such as social or relational bullying in their definitions of bullying (Berger, 2007).

Research exploring the way parents define bullying across Italy, Portugal, Spain, England, and Japan in their respective languages found that because the English definition of bullying does not translate into one word in other languages, parents had different views of the concept. Smorti and Menesini (2003) state that differences in rates of bullying reported in each country could be attributed to differences in the semantic fields across languages, and that this in turn will affect the way the problem has been

investigated in a cross-cultural perspective. This research not only has cross-cultural implications, but also has implications in the United States school system. In many schools, bullying could be a problem for children whose families have immigrated and are monolingual in their native language. Monolingual parents already face challenges communicating with school personnel, but they may face additional difficulty communicating about a child that is displaying bullying behavior or has become a victim of bullying if their understanding of the concept of bullying is different than that of the school personnel. For bilingual school staff and social workers, this research highlights the importance of facilitating communication with parents who may be uncomfortable dealing with the school system and finding the right words to communicate to monolingual parents about bullying.

Consequences of Bullying Behavior

Both internationally and in the United States, the consequences of bullying, in some situations, has been fatal. Examples include 3 suicides in Norway by bully victims in 1982 that sparked numerous studies and a notably successful intervention program by Dan Olweus, 15 suicides in Japan in 1994-1995, and the well-publicized examples in the United States: Columbine, CO, 1999 (two bullied boys killed 15 including themselves), El Cajon, CA, 2001 (one victim killed 2 and wounded 13), and Red Lake, MN, 2005 (10 dead), (Berger, 2007). More recently, bullying has been connected with the death of Lawrence King, aged 15, who was shot and killed by a 14 year old classmate in Oxnard, CA in February of 2008 after identifying himself as gay and enduring harassment by classmates, including the boy charged with his death. Even more recently two cases have been publicized in the media, including on the Oprah Winfrey show, about two separate

incidents in April 2009 when 11 year old Carl Walker-Hoover in Springfield, MA and 11 year old Jaheem Herrera in Atlanta, GA both hanged themselves after being bullied at their respective middle schools, just 10 days apart (Winfrey, 2009).

These last three cases all have in common that the victims were bullied about being gay. According to the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, LGBT students face higher levels of victimization than students who do not identify as LGBT. The GLSEN's 2007 National School Climate Survey polled more than 6,000 LGBT students and found that 9 out of 10 LGBT students (86.4%) said they had been harassed in the past year. Additionally, 60.8% said they felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network).

Carney (2008) conducted a study with 91 sixth grade students connecting bullying behavior with trauma reactions and found that the frequency of exposure to bullying events was the greatest factor in predicting trauma. This study was consistent with findings from other studies that show the traumatic impact of bullying on all respondents, including bullies, bully/victims, victims, (Baldry, 2004; Carney, 2000; Rigby, 2002) and bystanders (Janson & Hazler, 2004). These findings suggest that bullying can be a form of chronic repetitive abuse and might produce traumatic reactions in both victims and witnesses (Carney, 2008).

Researchers debate the frequency of school bullying, although all agree that it is a problem worth looking into. Whitted and Dupper (2005) point to a survey gathered in 1998 as a part of the World Health Organization's Health Behavior in School-Aged Children Survey, which was a national research study on the frequency of bullying in the United States. This survey reported that 30 percent of students, grades 7 through 10

reported being bullied by others, bullying others, or both. Other research corroborate this statistic, such as that of Christie-Mizell (2003), who stated that in the United States 20 to 30 percent of students are estimated to report being bullied during a single school year. Most agree that bullying has a negative impact on the school environment and on both perpetrators and victims of bullying. A shocking statistic reveals that an estimated 160,000 students stay home from school everyday in the United States because the fear of being bullied is so great (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Perhaps an even more troubling statistic is found in Dedman's (2000) research (as cited in Bauman, 2008, p. 362), that "investigations by the Secret Service revealed that in two-thirds of the high-profile cases of school shootings, the perpetrators had been chronic victims of bullying, and revenge was a prominent motivation." Clearly school bullying is an issue that school administrators, teachers, and parents need to take seriously and effective school interventions should be in place so that children can feel safe.

With respect to the middle school years, Juvonen, Le, Katanoff, Augustine, and Constant (2004) point out that fighting increases during the middle school years, with more students being bullied in middle school years than in either elementary or high school. Because research points to middle school years being some of the most developmentally and socially transitional years that children will undertake, where the frequency of bullying behavior increases, this study seeks to focus on bullying behavior occurring between 6th and 8th grade.

Types of Bullying

According to Berger (2007), bullying is manifested in many ways but is usually defined as physical, verbal, and relational. These categories will be used as subsections

to explore the different types of bullying. Cyberbullying is also added and represents the most recent trend in bullying behavior and research.

Physical bullying can be defined as hitting, kicking, beating, etc. Most school policies that advocate "zero tolerance" policies are directed towards physical bullying but it can be difficult for school personnel to determine whether a physical interaction is rough-housing, self-defense, friendly quarreling, or bullying. *Behavioral bullying* is another type of physical bullying where a student may do something mean such as steal a lunch, scribble on a paper, or hold another's nose (Berger, 2007). This type of bullying can be serious, as evidenced by a tragic event in Chicago where a boy killed himself after another student poured chocolate milk on his favorite sweatshirt (Berger, 2007).

Verbal bullying, which is when a bully directs repeated derogatory remarks or names towards a victim, has been shown to be more prevalent in schools than physical bullying but can be difficult for school personnel to identify. A study done by Unnever and Cornell (2004) anonymously surveyed middle school students and found that 37% of the students had been bullied, but that 25% had not told anyone and 40% had not told an adult of their victimization. One study showed that verbal aggression was recorded twice as often as physical aggression and other studies showed that physical bullying tends to decrease with maturation at a much quicker rate than verbal bullying (Berger, 2007).

Relational bullying, also called social bullying, is defined by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) as "harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships." Examples of this type of bullying could include gossiping, moving away when the target is near, or deliberately ignoring a classmate's attempt to join a conversation or play a game. Relational bullying is also difficult for school personnel to

spot and even more difficult to address. According to Crick, Grotpeter, and Bigbee, (2002), "existing studies indicate that girls are more relationally aggressive than are boys."

Cyberbullying is an electronic type of bullying that many researchers have focused on as a type of bullying that has become more prominent recently because of advances in technology and changes in the ways that people communicate. Cyberbullying can occur on websites and social networking sites online, over email, and by text message over cell phones and can be just as damaging as other types of bullying. Kowalski et al. (2005) as cited by Bauman (2008) reported in their research on cyberbullying that 25% of middle school girls and 11% of boys had been cyberbullied within the previous 2 months, 63% of whom were bullied by a schoolmate. According to research done by Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink (2008), who conducted a study with middle school aged children, cyberbullying was mostly an anonymous activity that took place in the home but can have great effects at school. An example was cited by Bergen (2007) in Canada where a digital photo of a girl showering was sent via cell phone message to the majority of her school. In cases where pictures and messages are posted on websites the implications go far beyond a single school, reaching sometimes billions of people.

Early Adolescent Development

According to Wigfield and Eccles (2002, para. 2), "the early adolescent developmental period is one in which individuals experience many changes, including the biological changes associated with puberty, important changes in relations with family and peers, and the social and educational changes related to transition from elementary to middle school." In other words, youth of middle school age are experiencing change in

every one of their ecological systems, including both mental and physical changes on an individual level.

In the past, American cultural norms tended to attribute adolescent behavior to hormonal changes, as in “raging hormones.” New research has shed light on the fact that it is not only the hormonal changes during adolescent development that are affecting development, but rather the brain itself is actually undergoing cognitive changes as the prefrontal cortex, which controls executive functioning, becomes fully mature during late adolescence (Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). These same researchers also state that adolescents are increasingly engaging in abstract thinking, considering the hypothetical as well as the real, engaging in more sophisticated and elaborate information-processing strategies, and reflecting on oneself and complicated problems (Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). But research also shows that adolescents are more likely to display risky behaviors than are young adults (Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). These findings are significant as related to bullying in that adolescents are engaging in new behaviors during this developmental period, without having fully developed the ability to make executive decisions.

Interestingly, there are definitive gender differences during this growth period, which some researchers argue can affect the prevalence of bullying. It is fairly well known that girls typically enter puberty before boys do, which means that during early adolescence, girls and boys that might be at the same chronological age are at quite different points in their physical development, which can complicate relationships between the genders (Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). But major differences can also exist within genders and these differences can have a profound effect on bully, victim,

bully-victim, and bystander status. Wigfield, Lutz, and Wagner (2005) point out examples such as boys who physically develop more rapidly having advantages in sports, which can in turn boost their status among their peers. In contrast girls who are at extreme ends of the spectrum of being physically over or underdeveloped can end up feeling different or ostracized by their peers. According to these researchers, the two groups to be most concerned about in terms of the effects that their pubertal development can have on social relations and overall adjustment are early-maturing girls and late-maturing boys (Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). From a social development perspective, the social isolation and maladjustment experienced by these two groups could cause these individuals to be at greater risk of exhibiting bullying, victim, or bully-victim behavior with respect to their peers.

Peer Relationships in Early Adolescence

Aside from (and sometimes due to) the physical, hormonal, and cognitive changes that individuals experience in early adolescence, relationships with peers are often also in transition. "The middle school transition often disrupts early adolescents' friendships, as they go to a new school and may not have much contact at least initially) with their friends from elementary school, and as children from the same elementary school often are split into many different classes and groups in middle school" (Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005, para. 17). Middle school transitions can be additionally stressful in that individuals are going from being the oldest and most physically developed in their school to the youngest and smallest. An individual who is well liked and has supportive friends in elementary school can find him/herself being ostracized in middle school. Friends who were previously supportive may feel the need to realign themselves as a measure of

protection. Interestingly, Wigfield, Lutz, and Wagner (2005) point out that in their research early adolescents' self-esteem is lowest immediately after the transition into middle school, or in the researchers' example junior high school, but it increases during students' seventh-grade year.

Research in Other Countries

Research in other countries on bullying in the school environment has yielded information on family and school variables affecting bullying, the role of caretakers in relation to bullying behavior, and training methods for teachers. In Australia, Ahmed and Braithwaite (2004) examine the relationship between family and school variables affecting bullying and argue that these two variables are interrelated and should not be treated as separate entities in the implementation of bullying implementation strategies. An interesting piece of their study links both family and school variables for both bullies and victims, pointing to an overlap in both. The study does not provide the answers as to why similar family and school factors result in one child becoming a bully, another a victim (Ahmed & Braithwaite 2004), but suggest that personality is known to play a role. Since personality is both biologically and socially constructed, an examination of how cultural variables such as ethnicity or socioeconomic factors come into play could yield some interesting findings.

Georgieu's (2008) study with 252 elementary school students and their mothers in Greece found that overprotective mothering was positively correlated to an increase of victimization of their children and that maternal depressiveness could be related to both victimization and perpetration with regards to bullying. In contrast, the study found that maternal responsiveness was positively related to the child's adjustment at school. The

study was interesting in that it called for the involvement of parents in the effort to deal with bullying in the school system, but the focus of his study was on mothers, with no mention of how the paternal relationship or relationships with other caretakers may come into play. Georgiou (2008) highlighted the need for more studies focusing on the means by which parents and children co-construct their relationship, but does not mention how such a study could be conducted or what results of such a study would imply. This study also has cultural implications but it is unclear if all of the students and families identified as Greek or if there were some cultural variations. It is also unclear what language was used to conduct the study, which could have implications on the findings.

Perhaps the most well known research conducted outside of the United States is that of Dan Olweus, who began researching the bullying phenomenon in Scandinavia in the 1970s. His research spurred a nationwide campaign against bullying that was quite effective, reporting substantial reductions (50% or more for most comparisons by students' age and grade) in self-reported bullying and bully victimization (Olweus, 1991). The Olweus bullying intervention program has been implemented in a number of middle school settings in the United States but success rates have varied.

This researcher would argue that while some of the research from other countries can be universally applicable it would not be wise to depend solely on this research to inform how bullying is constructed in the U.S. school systems and how school policies can be modified to incorporate effective bullying intervention strategies. Holt and Keyes (2004, p.122) raise the important point that although important research has been conducted outside of the United States, "conclusions from such investigations should be interpreted cautiously given the ways in which the United States differs from the

countries in which the majority of bullying research has taken place (e.g., the U.S. is less homogenous than most other countries surveyed)." Rodkin (2004) raises a similar concern, stating that American culture may pose some unique obstacles to bullying prevention, because there is an American tendency to see bullying as a part of growing up and American children receive mixed messages about aggression. This would suggest that bullying intervention strategies in the United States should be based on research that is conducted within the United States, instead of in other countries.

Factors that Contribute to Bullying Behavior

From an ecological-systems standpoint (Swearer & Espelage, 2004), factors that contribute to bullying behavior include interactions in four interrelated systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The microsystem consists of the individual's relationship with one system, such as home or classroom or playground. The mesosystem is the relationship between the systems in the individual's life such as home and school. The exosystem is comprised of the influences from other contexts such as parental involvement in the school or a school district's antibullying intervention. Finally the macrosystem is the influence of cultural factors such as societal attitudes. While research on bullying has focused on prevention and intervention, researchers have only recently been taking all of these factors into account in their relation to each other.

Much of the research on bullying, including research in other countries, has focused on attachment patterns and family relationships. "Literature on aggression and familial factors has provided considerable support for the association between general aggressive behavior in youth and lack of family cohesion (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Zelli, & Huesmann, 1996), inadequate parental supervision (Farrington, 1991), family violence

(Thornberry, 1994), hostile discipline techniques (Leober & Dishion, 1983), and poor modeling of problem-solving skills (Tolan, Cromwell, & Braswell, 1986)" (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000, p. 327).

Christie-Mizell's (2003) study of the relationship between interparental discord and a child's self-concept questions how this relationship can shape bullying behavior. They argue that because bullying is linked to self-concept and self-concept is linked to parental conflict, more discord in the parental relationship lends itself to a higher instance of bullying behavior in the child. Rodkin and Hodges (2003, p. 394) have similar findings about the ecology of bullying and state that the "attachment histories appear to play an important role in establishing aggressive-victim relationships [and] aggressive-victim dyads are more likely to be composed of individuals with histories of insecure attachment with their mother." What is interesting about the Rodkin and Hodges (2003) study is that these authors contend that highly aggressive boys can be among the most popular if they are also attractive and/or athletic, so that the myth that bullies are loners or hang out with other identifiable groups of bully rejects is debunked by this research. Another interesting point that the Rodkin Hodges (2003) study raises is that the relation between an early harsh environment and victimization by peers was nonexistent for children with many friends and exacerbated for children with few friends. Rodkin and Hodges (2003) do not, however, take race, ethnicity, or culture into account in their study.

Smith, Twemlow, and Hoover (1999) attribute bullying behavior to a lack of structure and consistency in the family home. The authors also suggest that children who are not read to by parents are at risk for becoming victims/bullies but do not point to

specific research proving this claim. There is no mention of the ethnic makeup of the study respondents, but their claims about the absence of consistency and reading seem to put the blame on parents of children who are bullies/victims without taking a culturally relative point of view. Smith, et al. (1999, p. 31) state, "In today's affluent and permissive society, it's rare to find consistency in the home. One of the attractions of gangs is the punishment or reprimand inflicted upon a member who disobeys the rules and is non-compliant. Children seem to crave structure and rules in their lives." With the absence of a culturally competent lens, this study becomes clouded by judgment, affecting the integrity of the author's claims. In a meta analysis of bullying intervention programs over a 25 year period, Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, and Isava (2008) claim research points out that bullies tend to have poorer academic skills and grades and lack the characteristic of empathy and that victims are more likely than perpetrators to bring weapons to school, for the purpose of revenge. However, this generalized view of the typical bully-victim dyad could be based on out of date research that is culturally biased.

From a social information processing model, Crick and Dodge (1994) have argued that distressful feelings may influence children's interpretations of social situations significantly and in ways that contribute to aggressive response patterns. Crick, Grotpeter, and Bigbee, (2002) use the example that when a student is feeling angry or upset about a peer's actions, this may contribute to evaluating the peer's intent as hostile, and thus, to enacting a retaliatory aggressive response. In other words, these researchers attribute bullying behavior to children's misinterpretation of social cues. Again, the argument can be made that if bullying is a result of the misinterpretation of social cues,

ethnic and cultural differences in the ways children are raised could make a difference in the interpretations children are making.

Much of the research done on the bullying phenomenon does not distinguish between the different types of bullying, instead focusing on the identification of bullies, victims, bully-victims, and bystanders. A study done by Crick, Grotpeter, and Bigbee (2002) focused on the differences between physically aggressive children and relationally aggressive children and indicated that not all aggressive children experience provocations in the same way. The researchers found that "physically aggressive children exhibited hostile attributional biases and reported relatively greater distress for instrumental provocation situations, whereas relationally aggressive children exhibited hostile attributional biases and reported relatively greater distress for relational provocation contexts" (Crick, Grotpeter, & Bigbee, 2002, p. 1134). These findings indicate that causes of bullying behavior can vary greatly depending on the type of bullying in which the individual engages. With technology providing new avenues for bullying contributing to phenomenon such as cyberbullying, this distinction between types and causes of bullying is significant.

In a study conducted with 499 middle schoolers at a predominantly Hispanic urban school, Demaray and Malecki (2003) examined the perceived support in the school environment that bullies, bully/victims, and bullies experienced. The researchers found that bullies perceived significantly less support from teachers than did a comparison group. These researchers suggest that one possible intervention is helping teachers find ways to provide social support to students who are bullies in their classroom (Demaray & Malecki, 2003). One of the major themes that Demaray and Malecki (2003) found with

regard to victims and bully/victims is that generally victims and bully/victims reported less frequency of perceived social support, but they placed greater importance on social support than the other groups (bystanders, for example). The researchers conclude, "because research has documented that social support is associated with many positive outcomes for children and adolescents, it is troublesome that victims, bullies, and bully/victims often perceived less support from individuals in their lives than the comparison group" (Demaray & Malecki, 2003, p. 485).

In another study conducted by Yoon and Kerber (2003) as cited in Bauman (2008), researchers focused on teacher support of relational bullying incidents. They found that teachers also had a lack of empathy for victims of relational bullying and were least likely to intervene in relational bullying incidents than in other types of bullying incidents. In contrast, counselors with antibullying training rated relational bullying as more serious and deserving of interventions. The implication here is that counselors are in a unique position to intervene in bullying incidents and that training for both teachers and counselors to recognize bullying incidents as such is important. An interesting point is brought up by Wentzel (2002) is that most of the studies done on the effects of teacher support have focused on middle class European American students, but that students from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds or those who are experiencing stressful events may be even more likely to need supportive relationships with teachers to adjust well to middle school. Going back to an ecological-systems theory approach, one could argue that if culture is an important contributing factor to the engagement or non-engagement of bullying and/or victimization, generalizations should not be made for all students based on the experiences of middle class European American students. In this case, the

researchers are implying that both race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status could be having an effect on the prevalence of bullying behavior. It is important to note here that discrimination and racism toward many oppressed groups are other pervasive examples that model elements of bullying (Bauman, 2008).

In order to address the gap in literature examining similarities and differences in risk factors across racial and ethnic groups, Choi, Harachi, Gillmore, and Catalano (2005) conducted a study with urban ethnic minority students ages 10-14 to test the applicability of the social development model. These researchers found that although common risk factors can be applied to adolescents regardless of their race and ethnicity, some important racial and ethnic differences existed in the magnitudes of relationships among factors that affect problem behaviors (Choi, et al., 2005). For example, youth beliefs associated with bonding to parents and problem behaviors were two areas where racial and ethnic differences presented themselves.

Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, and Haynie (2007) conducted a study using an ecological systems approach that compared commonalities and differences of perceived family, peer, and school relations across race/ethnicity and found that although school attachment and performance were not consistently related to bullying behavior, peer relationships are consistently related to bullying behavior in all racial/ethnic groups they studied. These researchers also found that although family structure was related to bullying behavior in white students only, all racial/ethnic groups experienced the association between parental communication and bullying behavior, and advocate for antibullying programs to take familial contexts into account when addressing bullying (Spriggs, et al., 2007). Deater-Deckard and Dodge (1997) highlight the importance of

parental physical discipline as related to the socialization process and propose that the cultural normative context in which physical discipline occurs will alter the meaning of discipline to the child, which will then mediate the child behavior outcomes.

Lansford et al. (2004) corroborate the position that socialization is culturally normative in their study that followed children into adolescence and examined race as a moderator of the link between physical discipline and adolescent externalizing behavior problems. These researchers' results concluded that while the experience of physical discipline in the first five years of life and during early adolescence was associated with higher levels of externalizing behavior problems in grade 11 for European American adolescents, it was associated with lower levels of behavior problems for African American adolescents (Lansford, et al., 2004). These findings suggest that more longitudinal studies should be done examining racial and ethnic differences in the socialization process that affect the factors that contribute to the development of problem behaviors. This researcher would also argue for culturally sensitive intervention strategies aimed at families who identify as ethnic minorities.

Studies have shown that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students face higher levels of victimization than students who do not identify as LGBT. The GLSEN's 2007 National School Climate Survey polled more than 6,000 LGBT students and found that 9 out of 10 LGBT students (86.4%) said they had been harassed in the past year (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, 2009). According to Mahan, Varjas, Dew, Meyers, Singh, Marshall, and Graybill (2006), who studied bullying victimization the LGBT population, LGBT students' victimization by peers is worsened by atypical family stressors and rejection or abuse for family members. This research suggests that

identifying as LGBT can not only contribute to victimization, but that interventions should take the possible presence of these additional stressors into account when working with this specialized population.

Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon (2000) conducted a study with 558 middle school students, pulling together research in all interrelated systems, from micro to macro. In this study, familial and adult influences, peer relations, and distal contextual factors were tested as correlates of a continuous measure of bullying and found that parental physical discipline, time spent without adult supervision, negative peer influences, and neighborhood safety concerns were each positively associated with bullying behavior. According to Bauman (2008, p. 368), "social learning is a powerful process, and when children see role models (e.g., parents and other adults, including teachers) use bullying and intimidation tactics, they use these approaches to getting their own needs met and solving problems." Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon (2000) found that neighborhood safety concerns were strongly correlated with bullying behavior. Since relatively few studies have examined these community variables with bullying behavior, Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon (2000) advocate for further research that focuses on the dynamics of the community and the impact on behavior in school. For the purposes of this study, it is useful to examine research that takes the school and neighborhood environment into account, in addition to peer and adult influences and familial patterns.

Factors that Protect Against Bullying Behavior

Much of the research cited thus far has focused more on factors that contribute to bullying behavior, with a scarcity of research focused on factors that protect individuals from engaging in bullying behavior. Orpenas and Horne (2006) discuss both risk and

protective factors using an ecological model, and point out that although most research focuses on risk factors, it is important to examine the protective factors that foster positive and nurturing environments that bring out the best in children. These authors contend that protective factors include interpersonal factors such as being female, receiving good grades, participating in school activities, displaying positive values, being socially and culturally competent, having a positive self-identity, and using time constructively. In addition to interpersonal factors, Orpenas and Horne (2006) also point out that close relationships (such as family and peers) and school environment can have an effect on protecting against aggressive behavior and that children with caregivers that are loving, communicate positively, provide active supervision, have clear roles and consequences, are role models of conflict resolution, and are involved in the child's life are at lower risk of exhibiting bullying behavior. Orpenas and Horne (2006) also contend school environments that have a positive climate, encourage positive relationships between teachers and students, provide high levels of supervision, have clear policies against bullying and foster excellence in teaching are protecting against bullying behavior in their school.

Research conducted by Mahan, et al. (2006) on LGBT students victimized by bullies showed that certain individuals who had strong support structures outside the school were able to avoid becoming targets of bullies, despite having attributes that would normally identify them as targets. These researchers suggest that attributes present in “non-targets” were seemingly the result of strong support by friends and parents, and that this support is not always a common factor in the LGBT experience (Mahan, et al., 2006). According to Mahan, et al. (2006, p. 61), “that certain students are effectively

able to counter bullying could have implications for interventions that could directly target the victims of bullying themselves.”

One study that focused on family relationships as protective factors against bullying behavior was conducted by Petit, Bates, and Dodge (1997), who interviewed 585 mothers pre-kindergarten and again seven years later when their children were in 6th grade to address the effects of supportive parenting (SP) on grade 6 adjustment by examining SP through four measures: mother-to-child warmth, proactive teaching, inductive discipline, and positive involvement in their study. The researchers found that high levels of SP mitigated the effects of family adversity on later behavior problems and forecast children's successful adaptation across elementary school years (Petit, Bates, & Dodge 1997). In other words, as long as SP existed, children were more likely to successfully adapt to school and less likely to display behavior problems despite the presence of adversity and hardship in the family environment.

Interestingly, Pettit, Bates, and Dodge (1997) also examined ethnic differences in their study and found that although in European American families, lower SES (socioeconomic status) was associated with less maternal involvement, in African American families, SES and involvement were unrelated. This has important implications about how ethnic differences could affect protective factors against bullying behavior, but more longitudinal research should be done to extrapolate more conclusive evidence on this matter.

Development of Policies Related to School Bullying

There is currently no federal policy that addresses school bullying. In response to recent publicized bullying incidents, some state legislators have created antibullying

legislation in their states. According to Srabstein et al. (2008), as of June 2007 thirty-five states enacted antibullying legislation in an attempt to protect 77% of United States students enrolled in public schools. Definitions of bullying vary extensively according to state. Only 16 of the 35 states agree on terminology of bullying that is similar or identical to the Olweus definition that "a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students" and only 15 states had enacted antibullying laws before 2003 (Srabstein, et al., 2008, p. 11). These authors frame bullying as a public health concern, pointing out that zero tolerance policies have been ineffective, and advocate for school bullying prevention laws at the federal level that include a "clear definition of bullying, an explicit articulation of a bullying prohibition, implementation of prevention and treatment programs, and acknowledgement of the association between bullying and public health risks" (Srabstein, et al., 2008 p. 15).

Currently a number of federal legislators are attempting to amend existing bills to address bullying behavior. The most recent proposed bill is known as the Safe Schools Improvement Act and was introduced in the House of Representatives on May 5th, 2009 (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network). The bill aims to amend the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act to include bullying and harassment prevention programs (GovTrack.us. H.R. 3132—110th Congress, 2007). The language defining bullying in this act is more specific than even the Olweus (as cited in Srabstein, et al., 2008) definition, stating:

The term 'bullying' means conduct, including conduct that is based on a student's actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender

identity, religion, or any other distinguishing characteristics . . . that A) affect one or more students, B) deprives students of access to educational opportunities or benefits provided by the school; and C) adversely affects the ability of a student to participate in or benefit from the school's educational programs or activities by placing a student in reasonable fear of harm. (GovTrack.us. H.R. 3132—110th Congress, 2007)

If this or another similar bill that clearly defines bullying in this manner goes into law, it will be important for teachers and administrators to monitor not only aggressive bullying behavior, but also how discrimination can be perceived as bullying. Additionally it will be equally essential for teachers and administrators to act as role models and monitor their own discriminatory behavior as it relates to the student body if they are truly going to create an environment that fosters safety.

Perspectives and Attitudes About School Bullying

Other research on the importance of having an understanding of the definition of bullying has been done by Mishna (2004), who conducted a qualitative study on bullying from perspectives of children, parents, teachers, and administrators in U.S. schools. Mishna (2004, p. 243) points to the confusion by all parties about the definition of bullying, particularly when the bullying involves children who are considered friends. "If a child turns to an adult who does not consider the situation bullying, the adult must respond in a way that does not invalidate the child's perspective of the situation. If children are not listened to and validated, they may doubt their own feelings and views and may stop telling adults about their victimization." This could affect statistics about the frequency of bullying, thereby downplaying the phenomenon in certain schools. In one study conducted by Charach, Pepler, and Ziegler (1995) as cited by Bauman (2008),

70% of teachers believed that teachers intervene "almost always" in bullying incidents, where only 25% of the students polled agreed with this assessment. Taking into consideration the linguistic differences highlighted by Smorti and Menesini (2003), the possible misunderstandings of the definition of bullying could be exacerbated. Because recognizing bullying depends on attitudes and beliefs about bullying, this provides further support for examining attitudes toward bullying (Mishna 2004).

Holt and Keyes (2004) conducted research in 18 Wisconsin schools to examine educator attitudes towards bullying in their schools in an effort to evaluate school climate factors that may influence bullying. In examining potential limitations of the study, the authors admit that the study was limited to only one state, and that the survey mainly focused on verbal bullying. It is interesting to note that Srabstein, et al (2008) found no evidence of anti-bullying legislation in the state of Wisconsin. These authors point to research done by Leff et al. in 1999 that found that African-American bullies were more likely to be identified than bullies of other ethnicities. While Holt and Keyes (2004) mention diversity in their discourse, they do not advocate for more comprehensive research on how diversity affects bullying. Despite the limitations of the study, perhaps the most interesting implication was the authors' suggestion that educators' attitudes and behaviors could be related to equity. They give the example of instructional methods that may create hierarchies as exacerbating the "imbalance of perceived power" and suggest that "teachers might foster bullying by failing to promote respectful interactions among students, modeling disrespectful behaviors, or declining to intervene in bullying episodes" (Holt & Keyes, 2004, p. 138). Like many other researchers, Holt and Keyes

(2004), advocate for a "whole school approach" and a "systemic thinking approach" that are derived from ecologically based interventions that have proven effective.

Antibullying Intervention Programs

In general, antibullying intervention programs have varied success. Still, LGBT students in the 2007 National School Climate Survey who reported having a comprehensive anti-bullying policy in their schools experienced lower levels of harassment and were more likely to report incidents of harassment to school staff (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network). Whitted and Dupper (2005), who discuss the importance of defining the term of bullying, include specific forms of direct, indirect, racial, and sexual bullying into their distinct definitions of bullying. In addition, these authors advocate for parental involvement in implementing school bullying prevention programs. They focus on the imbalance of power in their definition of bullying, stating that the same interventions that work on other types of violence are not effective against bullying because bullying behavior results from a power imbalance rather than deficits in social skills (Whitted & Dupper, 2005), which could in turn lead to victimization.

Lightburn (2003) also addresses implementation of successful antibullying programs, advocating for partnerships between schools and mental health agencies, suggesting that seriously disturbed children and youth need more than what schools or any single mental health provider can offer. This author advocates for a system of care paradigm as an answer to the mental health needs of children and adolescents who are prone to violent behavior, defining a system of care as “organized to provide a broad continuum of coordinated community-based programs involving flexible clinical and wraparound services that include family support” (Lightburn, 2003, p. 280). Espelage,

Bosworth, and Simon (2000) also advocate for a holistic approach and state that efforts should be made to assess the student's perceptions of adult role models, and counselors should include parents in designing prevention and intervention programs. The inclusion of family and mental health services into the solution is something that is lacking in other school violence prevention programs, including those mentioned by Smith et al. (1999) and Merrell et al. (2008).

Malecki and Demaray (2004) examine bullying from an ecological theory standpoint, arguing that social support is an important contextual factor that plays a role in the environment for both bullies and victims, one that many researchers have overlooked. The authors examine current research on social supports for bullies and victims that focuses on perceptions of social support for victims and bullies and the relationship of social support and various outcomes for students who are victims and bullies. Malecki and Demaray (2004) state that there is very little research in either of these categories and point out limitations in these studies, but do manage to use current research to discuss implications for bullying prevention and intervention programs, stating that it is feasible to design prevention programs that have an ecological focus that target parent-child relationships and parent involvement in schools (Malecki & Demaray, 2004). The authors also cite successful bullying intervention programs in schools that take similar holistic approaches to those found in Lightburn (2003). Like Miller (2003), using an ecological framework to understand bullying gives it a broader context than the research that focuses on attachment or familial relationships as the cause of bullying, without pointing out ways to intervene. While Miller (2003) advocates for changes to the societal structure in order to combat school violence, Malecki and Demaray (2004)

advocate that more research on the contextual factor of social support needs to be done in addition to more planning and development with an ecological framework.

While the Olweus program has been used as a model by many antibullying intervention programs, according to Bauman (2008), schools that had the best outcomes had the strongest commitment to the program, which typically had a designated staff member coordinating the program, and strong administrative support. This evidence points to the importance of the role of counselors and mental health professionals in the school systems, who are likely to have the most anti-bullying prevention training. Despite scant research on the effectiveness of counseling programs on middle schoolers' academic and social outcomes, existing research shows that such programs can be beneficial (Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005). Though in many cases it is difficult to isolate and control for all of the different factors to determine which are protective or risk factors of bullying, no research has shown antibullying intervention programs to be detrimental.

In fact, a study done by Brigman and Campbell (2003) found that goal setting, conflict resolution, and career awareness and participation was positively correlated with academic achievement and school behavior. Similar findings are evidenced by Lapan, Gysbers, and Petroski (2003) with 184 counseling programs where seventh graders in schools with such programs reported higher grades, a higher utility value of education, and stronger teacher relationships, after controlling for school and student level variables.

Role of School Counselors

There is very little research on the role of the school counselor in bullying events, but in many cases the school counselor plays an integral role in the intervention process.

With respect to the transition to middle school, there is a paucity of research on student relations with counselors (Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005) despite the fact that counselors can play an important role in creating safer school environments where bullying and other forms of violence are less likely to occur, helping more students have successful middle school experiences.

Unfortunately, some research points to counselors not being well versed in dealing with bullying situations. In research done by Jacobson and Bauman (2007, para. 26), the researchers found that counselors "rated physical and verbal bullying as more serious than relational bullying, had more empathy for victims of physical and verbal bullying than for victims of relational bullying, and were more likely to intervene in verbal bullying than relational bullying." These researchers also found that counselors tended to intervene more (i.e. calling parents and involving principals) for students identified as bullies than for those who were identified as victims and that those counselors who had participated in anti-bullying trainings took all forms of bullying more seriously (Jacobson & Bauman, 2007). Studies by Hazler, Miller, Carney, and Green (2001) corroborate these findings, also finding that both teachers and counselors take physical forms of bullying more seriously than social and emotional forms. With previous research cited by Unnever and Cornell (2004) on the reluctance of victims of bullying to seek adult help with bullying, the role of the school counselor is integral. This research suggests that more effective bullying intervention trainings are necessary for counselors to develop a deeper understanding of the definitions of bullying and influence their school's policies on bullying.

There are definite challenges to counselors' ability to intervene effectively in bullying situations. According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), a 250-to-1 ratio of students to counselors is recommended although the national average was actually 479-to-1 in the 2004-2005 school year (Schoolcounselor.org, 2005). Although these statistics are three years old, schools continue to face budget cuts and counselor positions are continuing to get cut. Traditionally, counselors' primary roles are to help with student scheduling, monitor and work with students with behavioral problems, and provide career advice. The student to counselor ratio and the numerous diffuse tasks they do may limit middle school counselors' ability to develop close relationships with many students (Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005).

Despite these challenges, results of a study by Bauman and Rigby (2006) as cited by Bauman (2008) found significant differences between the way teachers and school counselors handle bullying incidents. These authors found that counselors were less likely than teachers to dismiss or ignore bullying incidents and less likely to use punitive disciplinary strategies, and advocate for counselors to take a leadership role in efforts to educate other school personnel in order to reduce school bullying (Bauman, 2008). Wigfield, Lutz, and Wagner (2005), agree that counselors can be useful in helping early adolescents identify their competencies and match them to important activities that will help them foster self-esteem development.

Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon (2000, p. 332) state, "as counselors recognize the social context within which bullying behavior occurs, current prevention efforts should be modified to focus beyond individual behavior change and include an assessment of the sociocultural factors that may be contributing and maintaining bullying behavior."

Unlike other research that focuses on identifying roles in bullying, these researchers advocate that counselors might consider conceptualizing bullying as a continuum of behavior rather than focusing on identification of the bully (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000). This method fits with the ecological-systems theory and the social development model, but is not often utilized by researchers. Perhaps micro and macro level findings could be better integrated to foster more effective interventions if researchers focused less on identifying characteristics of bullies, victims, bully/victims, and bystanders, or isolating specific contributing factors that promote bullying behavior such as parental attachment. In this way they could begin to examine the larger socio-cultural and environmental factors that contribute to this behavior and create interventions that can function effectively on multiple levels.

Summary

It is clear that current research highlights bullying as a complex issue and one that all school systems in the United States need to address effectively in order to better ensure that all children are safe. Middle school in particular is an educational level where shifting social alliances and adolescent development contributes to the complexity of bullying behavior. Research on the contributing factors of bullying behavior provide varying reasons why children become bullies or victims, depending on a multitude of contextual factors. Some research suggests that bullying patterns are related to familial patterns, and other research points to individual biological tendencies. Research focusing on family as a contributing factor agrees that where there is disruption in the family system and patterns of attachment, both bullying and victim behavior can become more pronounced. Many of the bullying intervention programs designed in other countries are

based on research focusing on individual and familial patterns, but are not necessarily effective in the United States. This would suggest that intervention programs in the United States school system should be based on research conducted in the United States using a framework that takes into account multiple cultural contexts with which students and their families identify.

As the literature shows, bullying can present itself in many forms, including physical, verbal, relational, and most recently, cyberbullying. Because these different types of bullying exist, researchers have highlighted the need for a clear definition of bullying behavior, that is responsive to the needs and perspectives of children, parents, and school personnel, and take all forms of bullying behavior into account. An analysis of research on policies about bullying behavior points out that because there is no national policy about bullying, the definitions that state legislators use for bullying vary greatly and therefore the way that bullying behavior is treated varies greatly from state to state. With the current movement towards federal legislation it is essential to utilize a clear definition of bullying behavior to create policies for managing bullying behavior. Research on different perceptions of bullying highlight the importance of the role of the classroom teacher and school counselor in preventing and managing bullying behavior both in and outside of the classroom. Researchers tend to agree that intervention programs should involve the whole school and the parents of the school's students in resolving bullying behavior, but vary in their opinions about how this can be implemented.

There is a lack of current research on how counselors' perceptions and understanding of bullying can affect how schools address and work to prevent the

occurrence of bullying behavior. This study attempts to address this gap in current research. Using an ecological or social development model lens to demonstrate the scope of contributing factors, this study takes into account factors such as school environment and neighborhood context, in addition to individual and familial factors. Current research based on an ecological systems perspective advocates looking at bullying through this more comprehensive lens, pointing to the need for more effective interventions based on a holistic view of school children in their multiple environments. Because children spend a significant amount of time in school, more research on counselors' perspectives could shed light on how these environments are interacting to affect how school bullying occurs to influence the management and prevention of bullying behaviors.

This study examines perspectives of counselors (including psychologists and school social workers) in public, private, and charter school environments in an effort to explore how perceived differences in these environments could influence the management and prevention of bullying. This study is relevant to the field of school social work in that many school social workers are on the front lines when dealing with bullying behavior and creating bullying intervention programs. In addition, social workers working with children outside of the school environment in agencies and private practice will most likely encounter youth who have been affected by bullying behavior. These social workers need to be aware of and informed about bullying behavior and the importance of working collaboratively with school personnel to be most effective in the management and prevention of bullying.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study examined middle school counselors' perceptions about school bullying in an attempt to understand how the phenomenon of bullying presents itself in a variety of types of schools, including public, private, and charter school systems in the New York City area. An exploratory design was used with semi-structured interview questions in an attempt to take an in depth look at the counselors' perspectives as they relate to bullying they have perceived and observed in their respective schools. Ecological Systems Theory and the Social Development Model were used to inform this study. As discussed in the literature review, this study attempted to address the lack of current research on how counselors' perceptions of bullying can affect how schools react in the face of bullying behavior. This chapter includes the research methods used and describes issues related to sample selection, ethics pertaining to confidentiality, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of twelve respondents. Respondents met the study requirements of working as current middle school counselors with at least 3 years of experience counseling in schools. The sample of counselors interviewed were employed in public, private, and charter schools in the New York City area and comprised a diverse sample with reference to their age, gender, race, in order to represent a diverse population of counselors. In addition, all respondents were conversant in

English, the language used to conduct the interviews. Several were also bilingual in English and Spanish and represented perceptions of counselors who are able to communicate with students and families who also represent diverse cultures.

Recruitment was from the New York City School District area. A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit a purposive sample of respondents who come from private, public, and charter schools. This researcher began the recruitment process by using personal contacts to help locate respondents and schools that meet the research criteria. First, this researcher emailed personal and professional contacts to explain the goals of the project and provided contacts with a recruitment letter (Appendix A) that included information regarding purpose of the project, nature of the study, and this researcher's role in the project. This researcher requested that personal contacts distribute the recruitment letter to colleagues in an effort to reach potential respondents. The letter requested that that potential respondents contact the researcher directly if they were interested in participating in the study. Once contacted by the potential respondents, this researcher conducted a screening interview (Appendix B) by email to determine the eligibility of potential respondents based on the research criteria. The screening interview allowed this researcher to collect demographic data including the potential respondents' ethnic and cultural background, years working in their respective school, and experience with school counseling. Because of the small sample size, it was not possible to interview a sample of counselors who were necessarily reflective of the overall diversity in terms of cultural/ethnic diversity, age, gender, and years of experience of New York City. However every effort was made to obtain a final sample that

represented different types of schools, school settings, and neighborhoods where schools were located.

Respondents

As illustrated in Table 1, the sample was equally representative of males and females, with six females and six males participating in the study. Five respondents self identified their race as being White and/or Caucasian, and six respondents self identified their race as either Hispanic or Black and/or African American. Respondents self identified in terms of their race and ethnicity. Overall, respondents fell into the following broad categories: African American (n=3), White/Jewish Eastern European (n=1), White/Jewish American (n=1), White (n=1), Hispanic (n=1), Hispanic and Black (n=1), Black American (n=1), White/Native American (n=1), and one declined to state. Average years of school counseling experience was 7 (ranging from 3 to 20 years) and average years counseling in their respective schools was 4 (ranging from less than one year to 9 years).

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Respondents' Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Years of Counseling Experience, and Years Counseling in Current School

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <u>Gender</u> | | |
| Female | 6 | 50 |
| Male | 6 | 50 |
| <u>Race/Ethnicity</u> | | |
| African American | 4 | 33.3 |
| White | 3 | 25 |
| Multi-racial | 2 | 16.7 |
| Hispanic | 1 | 8.3 |
| Declined to State | 1 | 8.3 |
| <u>Years of Counseling Experience</u> | | |
| 0-5 | 6 | 50 |
| 6-10 | 5 | 41.6 |
| 10 and above | 1 | 8.3 |
| <u>Years Counseling in Current School</u> | | |
| 0-5 | 7 | 58.3 |
| 6-10 | 5 | 41.6 |
| 10 and above | 0 | 0 |

As seen in Table 2, five respondents were counselors in a public school setting and seven respondents worked in private schools. Nine respondents worked with only middle school aged children and three worked in school settings with younger or older students in addition to middle school aged children. For the purposes of this study, these counselors were asked to focus on the middle school population only in answering interview questions. Of the public school settings, one counselor identified their school as a charter school. Of the private school settings, six were identified as independent and one was parochial. Three of the 12 school settings that counselors worked in focused on serving a student population identified to have learning disabilities. Two of the 12 school settings were identified as following a Quaker philosophy. Six of the school settings defined middle school as 6th grade to 8th grade, three of the school settings defined middle school as 5th through 8th grade, and one school was in the process of closing and served only 7th and 8th grade students. Schools were located in 3 of New York City's five boroughs, including five in Manhattan, five in the Bronx, and two in Brooklyn.

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of School Type and School Location

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <u>School Type</u> | | |
| <u>Public</u> | 5 | 41.6 |
| Regular | 4 | 33.3 |
| Charter | 1 | 8.3 |
| <u>Private</u> | 7 | 58.3 |
| Independent | 6 | 50 |
| Serving Students w/Learning | 3 | 25 |
| Quaker Philosophy | 2 | 16.7 |
| Parochial/Catholic | 1 | 8.3 |
| <u>Location</u> | | |
| Manhattan | 5 | 41.6 |
| Bronx | 5 | 41.6 |
| Brooklyn | 2 | 16.7 |
| Queens | 0 | 0 |
| Staten Island | 0 | 0 |

Data Collection

Qualitative data for this study was gathered through in-person, individual, semi-structured interviews with an additional screening interview questionnaire through which demographic data was collected. A semi structured interview instrument was developed to collect exploratory data regarding the perspectives of counselors' in middle school regarding bullying. Questions were developed using current research, building upon questions that may have been used in previous studies.

Prior to the data collection process, this study presented and proposed safeguards to maintain confidentiality of its respondents to the Human Subjects Review Committee at Smith College School for Social Work. Approval of this proposal (Appendix C) indicates that this study followed federal regulations and the mandates of the social work profession. Before each interview, respondents were given an informed consent document (Appendix D), which described the study, outlined the potential risks and benefits of participation, and clarified their rights as human subjects. Each respondent voluntarily signed a copy of the consent form and were offered a copy of the form for their records. This researcher will keep the signed original copy of the consent form in a secured location separate from the data for three years after the conclusion of this study in accordance with Federal regulations.

In order to protect the identity of the respondents, their names and identifying information were changed to letter and number codes in this researcher's notes and transcripts. This information, along with digital voice files, demographic information, and researcher notes were stored separately from the informed consent documents. Names and other identifiable information that were recorded during interviews was either

disguised or removed during the transcription process and will not be used in the final thesis project. This researcher was the only party to have access to data and tape recordings that contained the respondents' identifying information.

Interviews began with respondents reading and signing the informed consent document. Once this process was completed, 20 interview questions were asked in sequence in an effort to explore respondents' perceptions of the definition of school bullying, the types of bullying that present themselves in their respective schools, each schools' formal and informal policies on handling bullying incidents, and common characteristics of children and parents of children labeled as both bullies and victims of bullying (for Interview Guide, see Appendix E). In some cases this researcher took time to clarify questions and on occasion asked for further ideas on existing questions. All interviews were recorded by digital recorder and transcribed. The interview process took place between February 20, 2009 and May 5, 2009, with interviews ranging in length from 19 minutes to 57 minutes.

Data Analysis

Collected data was recorded and then transcribed in order to identify relevant research findings which included definitions of bullying, types and frequencies of bullying occurring in schools, school policies and procedures used to address bullying, and characteristics of children and parents of children labeled as bullies and victims of bullying. The transcripts were analyzed for common and salient themes and data was compared across respondents to determine similarities and differences in respondents' perspectives. Significant themes were then pulled and put into respective categories. In some cases direct quotes from respondents' narratives were used to highlight important

themes and ideas. Demographic information was analyzed manually by creating an Excel spreadsheet for a visual representation of pertinent information.

One limitation to this study is that generalizations cannot be made from its results due to the selected research design and the small sample size. This study is intended to be an initial exploratory study of the perceptions of middle school counselors who are working in school settings in the New York City area about how bullying presents itself in their respective schools. It is this researcher's hope that findings from this study will perhaps spark further interest in pursuing ongoing research that focuses the bullying phenomenon as it presents itself in urban schools and using the unique perspectives of middle school counselors in order to create a deeper understanding of the serious phenomenon of bullying behavior in middle school settings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

Current research on bullying phenomenon indicates that taking a holistic approach to bullying prevention, including involvement of individuals, family members, teachers, the school community, and the neighborhood community can be most effective in preventing bullying behavior. Although much research has been done on contributing factors of bullying behavior, very little research addresses how school or neighborhood environmental factors could contribute to or protect against bullying behavior. There has been insufficient research that has focused on understanding bullying through the perspective of middle school counselors. Middle school is an important developmental age for youth because of the physical and intellectual growth that occurs during this period and the transitional nature of the middle school experience.

Interviews for this project were intended to address that gap. Respondents were selected to talk about bullying behavior in their respective schools from their own perspectives. Questions were designed to obtain information on counselors' perspectives on how bullying presents itself in the context of classrooms, schools, and neighborhoods where schools are located. Specifically, respondents were asked questions about the four different types of bullying explored in the literature (See Literature Review Chapter): physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying. Respondents were also asked about identifying characteristics of bullies, victims, and parents/guardians of both. Respondents

also provided their perspectives on intervention techniques and counselor experience and training. This chapter is organized based on the following topic areas: school settings, bullying incidents, students labeled as bullies, students labeled as victims, and counselor experience and training.

School Settings

Respondents represented a diverse range of school types in the New York City area. It was this researcher's hope that by exploring this diverse range of school settings in an urban area, themes would emerge with the way bullying presented itself in the respective environments. While the small sample size does not allow for generalizations to be made, the following section describes the types of school settings that respondents represented. It is divided into the following subsections: school demographics, neighborhood demographics, school definitions and policies, school environment, and counselors' definitions of bullying.

School Demographics

It should be noted that the demographic information reported here was based on the respondents' perspectives. In some cases, respondents had access to school statistics and in other cases they did not. Of the thirteen schools represented by counselors (one counselor worked for two parochial schools), six were reported to have 60% or more White students with some reporting that as much as 85% of their student body was White. All of these schools were private schools and counselors working at these schools also described their student body as being mostly upper middle to upper class. Three of these schools were private schools serving students with learning disabilities and these schools received some public funding to serve students who may not otherwise be able to

afford attending but as one counselor explained, the Board of Education "usually pays for half the tuition for some kids but they have to go through quite a process. They have to get lawyers and they have to present . . . and say that their kid is not getting the necessary educational services in their district so it's a whole process."

The two private parochial schools represented were reported to have a school population made up of "mostly Latino and African American" students. The five public schools represented also reported having mostly Latino/Hispanic (ranging from 50% to 85%) and African American (ranging from 10% to 90%) populations. Since public school education is free and with zoning restrictions four of five public schools were located in what are considered "poor" neighborhoods (discussed in the next subsection), it can be assumed that most students attending these public schools come from a lower socioeconomic background than those attending private schools.

In general, private independent school counselors reported a less diverse student population than did public school counselors, with the exception of the parochial school counselor. Private school student demographics consisted of mostly white students, and from higher socio-economic backgrounds than public school student demographics, which represented mostly students of color and lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Neighborhood Demographics

Respondents were asked about the neighborhood demographic of their school location in an effort to understand how environment may play a role in bullying behavior. Again, information obtained for this section is strictly based on the subjective opinion of each respondent. All counselors from independent private schools reported that the neighborhood demographic differed from the demographic represented by the student

population because many students traveled from other areas or boroughs to attend these schools. Many stated that the neighborhood where their private school was located was "mixed," with three stating that the neighborhood demographic was "mostly white," and "upper middle to upper class."

In contrast, all of the public school counselors as well as the private parochial counselor stated that the neighborhood demographic was similar if not the same as their student demographic because most of the students attended schools that are located in their neighborhoods. This, according to most respondents, is because of New York City School District's zoning laws that require students to live in the same zone where their school is located in order to attend. One public school counselor talked about the neighborhood environment as a trigger to bullying behavior, stating, "the location I think has a lot to do with it. Because here we're in a poor neighborhood and the kids behave the way that their parents do. We have some kids that break the circle and go to college but the percentage is low." Three public school counselors also mentioned that gang activity in the neighborhoods have a negative effect on bullying behavior.

School Definitions and Policies

All respondents were asked about their respective school's definitions and policies around bullying behavior. When asked if their schools have clear definitions of bullying, responses varied greatly. Only two of the counselors responded with school definitions. One responded that the school defined bullying as "any behaviors that are hitting, verbal abuse, harassment of any sort, sexual, inappropriate touching, any harassment." Another provided a school definition that focused on the feelings of the victim, stating "we believe that when a student gets uncomfortable because another student or group of students is

harassing them for any type of reason, that for us is bullying." Berger (2007) might argue that although both of these definitions contain the necessary element of harm, neither contains the other two critical elements of repetition and unequal power. Three of the respondents claimed that their schools' definition of bullying is the same as their own personal definition, perhaps because they are often the ones that handle these situations on behalf of the school. Three other respondents stated that their schools' do not have a definition of bullying and one claimed that to his knowledge the school has never even formally talked about bullying. One respondent wasn't sure if her school had a definition of bullying but felt that if it did, the definition may not be accurate. She stated "I feel like people say 'Oh he's bullying him' when he's really just being mean. I feel that bullying now is really just this sort of catch-all and I feel like that then hurts dealing with it." This statement exemplifies that not having a formalized definition of bullying that all school personnel can use creates confusion when dealing with bullying incidents. The fact that so few of the respondents could state their school's definition of bullying could have significant implications on how these schools deal with bullying incidents.

Only three of the twelve counselors were able to make a statement regarding a formal policy that their school has put into place. One was a private independent school counselor, who stated that at her school there is "no tolerance for bullying. We address it right away in accordance with standards but we deal with it right away. That's the policy and it's not acceptable to treat others in a disrespectful way." Another was a private parochial school counselor who stated, "physical bullying it's supposed to be automatic suspension from school." The last was a public school counselor who stated, "The policy, it's in the Board of Education handbook. The policy is suspension." It is

interesting that this public school counselor mentioned the Board of Education handbook as having a school bullying policy, whereas none of the other public school counselors mentioned this.

Although most schools did not have formal policies on bullying behavior, this is not to say that schools did not implement consequences for bullying behavior. A private school counselor explains, "they might get suspended for a day or two, or they might do community service or get detention on a Friday afternoon. Or stay after lunch or lose, they get out to lunch privileges, so there isn't one set thing that happens." Similarly, another private school counselor explained that although the policy is "zero tolerance," in his mind there is no policy and the incidents that are brought to him are handled on a case-by-case basis. Other consequences included writing an apology or meeting with an administrator, teachers, or the counselor. Three counselors stated explicitly that their school has "no policy" on bullying behavior and one public school counselor expressed frustration over this. Another public school counselor says that she rarely sees or hears about bullying behavior because "a lot of times they (teachers) handle the bullying in the classroom." Generally, most respondents were not aware of any formal school policies on bullying behavior. This could be related to the fact that so few schools had formal definitions of bullying.

School Environment

Respondents were asked several questions about the school environment, including how administrators are helping or getting in the way of creating a bully-free environment, and aspects of the school's environment that may be triggering bullying behavior or protecting students from bullying. Most respondents had only positive things

to say about their administrators supporting the creation of a bully-free environment.

Positive feelings about administrators included:

"pretty supportive"

"work together"

"attentive"

"helpful"

"hands on"

"definitely not getting in the way"

Only two counselors had negative things to say about their administrators. One public charter school counselor explained that not only did their school not have a bullying policy, but that administrators can get in the way of creating a bully-free environment:

Administrators are sweeping it under the rug . . . because they bully too if you think about it. Not students, but other staff members. Our students are very smart and they can pick up on things like that and they do. And we do have an administrator that is not the most friendliest person in the world and the students see that and they don't want to go to this person because the person is unfriendly and they see how the person treats the staff members . . . So they probably say, "Gee then why can't I be nasty or mean to someone?"

Two other private school counselors mentioned that the lack of diversity on their faculty was an environmental factor that may trigger bullying behavior, or at least affect the way bullying incidents are handled. One respondent explained that he felt some kids were disciplined more than others based on their race: "I mean we have teachers that work here that never met a black kid before they came here. They never lived in the city. They . . . are moving to NY for the first time. And they don't get it totally." Three other counselors also brought up teacher bias as having a negative influence on the way bullying incidents are handled. One explained that some teachers "don't really have time

to address" bullying incidents. Another explained that the way bullying situations are handled at his school is:

Very subjective. Especially with professionals. So a teacher might allow see something go on or ignore it. I get that a lot where they say "yeah the teacher was standing right there and they didn't say anything when Johnny came and threw the ball in my face." And then I'll go to the teacher and say, "What happened?" and he's like, "I don't know, it wasn't a big deal."

Another environmental factor that respondents mentioned are contributing to bullying behavior was a lack of supervision at gym class, during lunchtime, or on the playground. Two of the public middle schools were housed in the same building as one or more other middle schools and counselors stated that conflicts sometimes occurred between the schools because of a lack of community. One counselor questioned the motives behind this environmental factor:

You hear that schools are being broken up into smaller schools . . . they are broken up into smaller schools, but they keep them in the same building . . . But they still run into the same problems because they run into each other coming in, lunchtime, gym, going and coming in the afternoon, and I'm saying, "Is this for the kids? Or is it for giving the administrators a job of the assistant principal?" Instead of having one job of principal for the whole school, now you got 8 and 12 assistant principals.

Protective factors that helped school personnel create bully-free environments in their schools included a sense of community, supportive administrators, warm teachers, and having enough counselors available to talk to kids when issues arose. Two of the schools that respondents represented had Quaker philosophies influencing their mission statement and values and both counselors representing these schools felt that this was a protective factor when it came to bullying behavior. Two counselors (one public and one private) mentioned that they felt their school environments were more supportive because the majority of the middle school students came from the same elementary school.

Generally, respondents could name risk and protective factors for bullying and describe how they related to bullying behavior, which included administrator and teacher attitudes. Most respondents expressed the common sentiment that school environment does play a role in bullying, whether to help protect against or contribute to bullying behavior.

Counselors' Definitions of Bullying

The majority of the respondents were able to provide a clear definition of bullying from their own perspectives, however there were three out of twelve respondents who were not able to provide a clear definition, and no one was able to provide a definition that was consistent with their school's formal definition of bullying. Of the respondents who answered this question, most agreed that bullying behavior involved a perpetrator and a target and that both could be individuals or group of individuals. In some cases, respondents pointed out that bullying involves "power," "controlling," "intimidation," and "taking advantage of" with respect to a perpetrator's behavior towards a target. Some respondents defined bullying in general terms, such as "an imbalance of power in a relationship" or "when one child is picking on another child." Other respondents provided more specific criteria, including the repetitive nature of bullying, and the imbalance of power in social relationships. One counselor considers bullying behavior "when a student feels like they want to navigate their social relationships through demanding power and thru controlling of others [by] insulting others through intimidation and social relationships." Other counselors focused more on how the bullying behavior affects victims in their definitions and used terms like "threatened," "anxious," and "fearful." In general, respondents' responses indicated that all were aware

that bullying involves at least one victim and perpetrator, but few mentioned all three of the crucial elements of bullying defined by most researchers, which include repetition, harm, and an imbalance of power.

Bullying Incidents

All respondents were able to cite at least one specific example of a bullying incident that had occurred in their school in the past school year. Some respondents were able to cite multiple examples of all types of bullying, and some incidents occurred as recently as the day of the interview. This section contains respondents reports of the different types of bullying that occur in their schools and the following data will be presented in five subsections: physical bullying, verbal bullying, relational bullying, cyberbullying, issues of diversity and bullying, and interventions.

Physical Bullying

The majority of the respondents considered physical bullying to be a rare occurrence in their middle school settings. Only two respondents felt that physical bullying was "rampant" or that instances if it occurring were "pretty high." Three respondents claimed that physical bullying never occurs in their schools, but upon further investigation one of the three was able to think of a situation in which what they considered to be physical bullying had occurred. Many of the respondents had difficulty coming up with situations where physical bullying occurred because of a lack of clarity of the definition of bullying. A public school counselor who had originally said that physical bullying does not occur in his school and that he could not think of an instance, later described a situation that does fit the description of physical bullying, with the elements of harm, repetition, and an imbalance of power:

We don't have bullying. Well there was one incident of bullying where a boy bullied a girl. We thought it was bullying because the kid was pushing her all the time. She came to us and she said she mentioned the name of the kid and we pulled the kid and we . . . and it was crazy because she was already saying that he was attacking her. It probably started as a game, and it continued. And we stopped it.

Another private school counselor described physical bullying on behalf of an 8th grade class that he considers to be problematic with their behavior towards the 6th grade class. This respondent considers physical bullying occurrences in his school to be a once or twice a week occurrence with a "group of 8th graders who the class itself has been known as always having a lot of conflicts . . . waiting for the younger students to come and slamming the door on their face or waiting for the younger students to walk into the door, or knock books out of their hands, setting them up against the wall, grabbing them."

Other counselors were able to come up with specific instances of physical bullying such as one student pulling another student's arm behind his back, slapping on the back really hard, doing wrestling moves, pushing a student into the stairwell, or shoving in line. Although these occurrences seem to be rare, one respondent mentioned that they happen more often during time periods like after gym class, when there is a lack of adult supervision. Although considered to be rare, every respondent was able to think about and comment on physical bullying incidents that occurred in their school.

Verbal Bullying

All but one respondent claimed that verbal bullying occurs more often than physical bullying at their schools, ranging from multiple times a day to once or twice a week. Some respondents described verbal bullying as sometimes "innocent," or "teasing" or "persistent gossiping" that is typical middle school student behavior. Others discussed the reactions of victims of verbal bullying, which included being in tears, feeling really

bad, getting angry, or in one case going " completely berserk . . . throwing chairs around and stuff like that." One counselor discussed how verbal bullying often presents itself in her private school:

When you ask the kids about it they often will say they're just joking or that's not what they meant . . . We have kids here who are "weirdos" and a lot of it unfortunately in our middle school you hear a lot of terms like "he's so gay" about kids they suspect may be gay. That's really, anybody who doesn't fit the norm. And the girls can do it too. They can subtly make comments about the way they dress, their hair, it generally has to do with not fitting in with whatever they normalize here.

Another private school counselor expressed a similar view about verbal bullying occurring as a "social hierarchy" situation with "the popular kid trying to cut down someone else, you know, who's the easy target to pick on socially. Well that kid's not popular lets make fun of him. You know, [he has] no recourse because I have 10 friends and he only has 2 friends . . ." A respondent who counsels at two parochial middle schools described the consequences of a disturbing situation where an individual boy was bullied by multiple students in his classroom for months despite the school's efforts to combat bullying by holding weekly "bullying circles" in each classroom:

This boy in particular was being bullied for the whole year, you know calling him, saying that he smells, they don't want to sit near him and you know, talking about everything and you know, it was never brought up. For months it was going on and no one brought it up during the bullying circle. When we actually brought it up after it happened, after this kid ran away and we had the police looking for him and everything like that, then it finally came out that pretty much everyone was involved. Everyone was saying things to him and no one was stopping it.

Another private school counselor described what he considers "the worst bullying incident I've seen," that took a verbal form and exemplifies that verbal bullying can also take on sexist undertones:

This African American kid who is always the first to point out racist comments everywhere and yet you know, has no problem saying, "You motherfucking ho,

what up bitch?" You know I'm like, "Wait a minute, that's not OK." And, "Yes it its, what's wrong with that?"

Although most private school counselors could come up with a verbal bullying incident, public school counselors' responses varied. Two of the four public school counselors claimed that verbal bullying happened "very often" and "all the time." One felt that it happened less frequently, maybe "once every three months." Two other public school counselors didn't feel that verbal bullying occurs often at their schools and one could not even come up with a situation that had occurred in the last school year. Two of the public school counselors described verbal bullying situations that escalated into a physical retaliation on the part of the victim, whereas in private school counselors' descriptions of verbal bullying situations there was no mention of victim retaliation. In general, private school counselors seemed to have an easier time coming up with specific instances of verbal bullying than the public school counselors. It is interesting that some of the public school counselors did not see verbal bullying at all in their schools and that others saw verbal bullying incidents as connected to other forms of bullying.

Relational Bullying

This type of bullying, which Crick and Grotpeter (1995) define as "harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships," can be more difficult for adults to both spot and address in school environments. Because relational bullying can take on many forms, including verbal and cyberbullying, some respondents had more difficulty quantifying instances of this type of bullying. One private school counselor feels that all types of bullying take a relational form, stating that bullying in his experience is "always about who is cool, who's got the right girlfriend, who's doing what, who said what about my sister, that kind of stuff. It's always, whether

it's physical or not, it always revolved around people's relationships. It always does." In contrast, a public school counselor did not believe that relational bullying occurred at her school, although the situation that she described fits the Crick and Grotpeter (1995) definition:

It's not bullying, it was just a rumor . . . that went around and this girl got mad at everybody and the group didn't want to deal with her. Because of the rumors she was spreading. So they isolated her from them and then she came to me and she was upset and I had to take her out of her group and put her in another group. And still this was a couple of weeks and even as of today I cannot have her in that group. They still don't want her in there. But they don't really want someone spreading rumors that are not true. And so . . . maybe she learned her lesson.

One unexpected finding that came up during conversations about relational bullying is that respondents found it difficult to determine who was the bully and who was the victim. The above situation is an example in which both parties were acting out relational aggressions. These cases can be particularly difficult for school personnel to handle because consequences are inevitably based on the subjective bias of the adult who encounters the situation.

In many relational bullying situations, the identity of the bully and the victim were clear. Other situations that were brought up in the interviews included examples such as a boy writing a letter for another boy to the girl that he was interested in, another boy repeatedly grabbing a 6th grade student's private journal and reading it out loud to the class, writing mean things about others in the bathroom, the creation of "cliques" that have names and are exclusive, telling a student that the lunch table is full when there is clearly an extra seat available, and not inviting particular students to a party that the rest of the class attended.

Relational bullying, while present in both the public and private school settings, presented itself differently in each. In the public school realm, two counselors talked

about bullying that happened as a result of certain students getting held back one or multiple grades. One public school counselor described a situation that occurred with 5th grade girls:

We have a student that is stronger . . . mentally because she's been held over several times. So she's stronger and she's bigger. She's . . . wiser than the rest of the 5th grade girls. So she teams up with some of the girls to isolate another girl from being their friend. Which is a classic bullying technique that we see a lot. So I think because she feels and she knows that she's bigger than these other students [and] wiser, that she can have a bunch of friends go against another student.

In the private school setting, relational bullying also presented itself in the classroom, but never in situations where students got held back. There were a few interesting situations that came up around clothing, including students showing up on Monday morning to see that certain members of their class were wearing sweatshirts given out as a party favor at a celebration where they were not invited. The school has since made rules about this. Another situation that revolved around students dressing the same happened at the same school and became problematic:

On Halloween, a whole clique of girls decided that they would actually dress up as the "Queen Bees." You know, so I can't think of an example that stands out more than girls sort of saying . . . and there were like 12 of them, and anybody who wasn't . . . wasn't.

Many respondents made some mention of relational bullying being more "subtle" than other forms of bullying, making it more difficult to intervene in relational bullying situations. Whereas many of the relational bullying incidents occurred between parties of the same gender, one private school counselor talked about a relational bullying incident that occurred between boys and girls:

[A] bunch of girls who were not cool, a bunch of boys that think they're cool and popular will come up and put their arms around us and say "How ya doing?" We know that they're making fun of them, you know, then they'll run away and laugh. They'll pretend to flirt with them. And its really hurtful to the girls cause they

know that these boys don't like them. They know that they don't, they're not social in that way with them. And it's really mean. And the boys will just say "Oh we're just joking." I think that happens every day.

From the perspectives of the respondents, relational bullying occurred in both public and private school realms. In all relational bullying situations, victims were targeted by either isolation or humiliation in front of a group of other peers, fitting the definition that relational bullying involves the manipulation or damaging of peer relationships. In general, some counselors initially had a more difficult time coming up with relational bullying situations, but were later able to mention situations that fit the definition of relational bullying.

Cyberbullying

All twelve respondents had heard of cyberbullying and only three did not believe that cyberbullying occurred at their school. Many of the other respondents stated that cyberbullying was occurring "frequently" and most agree that, as one counselor summed up, "I think it occurs a lot; I don't think we hear about it a lot." Many mentioned the difficulty of quantifying these situations because although they often play out on school grounds, they are initiated at home over social networking websites like Facebook, Myspace, and AIM or through cell phone texts. One private school counselor explained that it is getting increasingly difficult to monitor cyberbullying, explaining, "This year we haven't had as much as in years past because I think they're just learning to not mention it anymore but I would say it happens frequently." Of note, only one of the seven private school counselors did not think cyberbullying was occurring at her school and she explained that she felt this was because the school is specialized to enroll students with learning disabilities who aren't comfortable using the computer or text messaging. Of the five public school counselors, two had never seen cyberbullying occur. One public

school counselor brought up the issue of access, explaining, "I don't know how many of them have computers at home or have cell phones or can afford that type of luxury because it is a luxury."

Respondents that stated that cyberbullying occurred at their school could all think of specific situations, and in some cases the cyberbullying that began off of school grounds escalated into other forms of bullying, including physical, verbal, and relational. A public school counselor talked about a big fight that occurred where a girl was "jumped" after school after some cyberbullying exchanges occurred on AIM. The counselor explained that the school personnel have still not been able to figure out what started the fight because students refuse to talk about it. A private school counselor talked about a situation with a 7th grade boy that contained all forms of bullying:

There was this 7th grader who was getting . . . he was being rejected by peers for a whole school year. The whole previous school year. He defended a girl who his friend had called "slut" and he maybe punched the kid or something. And it was brought back up this year and another kid started texting another kid that this one boy [and] was being mean and it was just constant. This one boy was accusing the other boy of doing all of this stuff and something like pushed him or something and you know the first boy was sort of antagonizing him, you know, riling him up. Then this boy who was doing the texting, texted someone else but was using this boys name and you know so it's like very insidious. Hard to figure out where it's starting and who's involved and everyone who's involved and so he was kind of on the outs because everyone was not wanting him. He wasn't invited to a bar mitzvah and you know the whole [thing]. So many kids get involved and normally they don't invite the whole grade but this one invited everyone but this kid and so that is one big thing that happened.

This situation exemplifies the complications that occur around bullying instances and that the repetitive nature of bullying can take on many different forms in its materialization. Other cyberbullying situations included physical threats over AIM, Facebook, and cell phone texting that one or more students would beat another up on school grounds. A private school counselor brought up a disturbing situation that had

occurred the previous year with the 8th grade girls, where a group targeted another girl from their classroom on AIM and went as far as telling her "why don't you just kill yourself?"

Most of the respondents expressed frustration over not knowing how to intervene in cyberbullying situations. One even stated that the previous year her principal had gotten a lawyer involved in a cyberbullying situation who had advised that the school could not legally get involved because the bullying had occurred off of school grounds. Another private school counselor talked about a situation that was similarly frustrating:

Somebody had through their phone, they had taken video in a classroom of a kid teasing another kid and put it on Facebook and so it was really a problem on a lot of levels. How could this happen where the teacher was? And it was just so premeditated as entertainment for the student body that this one vulnerable kid was getting teased and it was all orchestrated and taped. So it was very disturbing.

When asked what type of bullying that their school is least prepared to deal with, two private school counselors brought up cyberbullying. One explained:

The cyberbullying, Maybe it's a little harder in a sense that we don't have access. If someone says, you know that they did it on Facebook, I don't, you know, I'm not at the point where I'm subpoenaing people's Facebook pages so that hasn't happened and I don't know if it would ever get to that.

In summary, cyberbullying was much more difficult to spot than other forms of bullying in all types of school settings because many of the instances occurred from home or using mediums not visible to school personnel. Most who spoke about cyberbullying instances also felt that this type of bullying was also more difficult (and therefore more frustrating) to address because of limits on the school's jurisdiction. Respondents who claimed that cyberbullying was not occurring at their school were in the minority, but those who did make this claim attributed it to lack of access.

Issues of Diversity

When asked how bullying is related to issues of diversity in their respective schools, respondents' responses varied greatly. Only three of the twelve respondents did not think that bullying in their schools was related to issues of diversity at all, and two were public school counselors. One explained that this was because, "they all come from the same community." The private school counselor explained that because her school focuses specifically on children with learning disabilities, the students are "actually more supportive of each other because everyone has learning disabilities and they used to be targets" in their previous schools. Both of the other private school counselors whose schools served populations with learning disabilities also made mention of this phenomenon. In contrast, another private school counselor who counsels at two parochial middle schools said, "I do think a lot of kids make fun of each other for getting left back . . . like a learning disability."

Other counselors made mention of diversity issues related to race and/or ethnicity (n=5) and sexual orientation (n=3). Of the incidents that involved race and/or ethnicity, a few involved students using racial epithets towards others and one involved conflict between a bilingual class and the rest of the school. One counselor at a private school that she described as being predominantly (70%) white, explained that girls in her school get bullied "if you're fat, if you're hair is crazy, and anything that is not the norm here. And that can be an ethnic thing; pressure to conform to a stereotypical White woman's hair, you know straight, fine." Another private school counselor talked about a situation where a student of color used relational bullying to manipulate her classmates:

I'd say the big event of the school year resulted in a suspension. [It] as a colored girl putting notes in other colored students, other minority students' bags and

whatever, like you know, using racial epithets because she wanted to be their friend. Because they weren't, because she was crazy to begin with . . . she was doing this because she wanted to make it look like the white kids were being racist. You know like these anonymous notes, like the N word in somebody's bag and you know like, "Oh yeah these kids are so racist," which she was doing it all along . . . so you know race is not always used in the real sense of what we would think of, you know that person is racist in an active way.

Sexual orientation was an issue that came up with many of the respondents. One explained, "I mean, in middle school, you know 'gay' is the worst so that's always used as a way to put someone down, you know, a derogatory term." Another counselor talked about how students who are "very theatrical . . . they (bullies) do pick them up, you know you little faggot, you little this . . ."

Diversity issues were present in respondents' descriptions of bullying incidents, but did not follow any particular pattern in the way they presented themselves. The respondents that felt that diversity issues were not present in bullying incidents attributed this to commonalities that the student body shared. Those respondents who did mention diversity issues had varying responses. In other words, these findings do not lend themselves to making generalizations about how diversity issues present themselves either in types of bullying incidents or types of school settings.

Interventions

When discussing interventions employed by the school or how bullying situations are handled by counselors, responses varied. Some schools had anti-bullying programs already put into place, such as a "bullying circle," which is a weekly meeting held in each classroom where students are encouraged to discuss feelings and incidents that have occurred. The parochial school counselor whose school utilizes this intervention had doubts over the effectiveness of the program since a major bullying incident had occurred this past year despite the weekly talks. Another private school uses a "Let's Get Real"

anti-bullying curriculum where teachers are trained and students watch videos, have discussions, and do follow up workshops. A private school integrates an anti-bullying program into their 6th great health curriculum, where they are currently watching the movie "Mean Girls" and discussing bullying that occurs in the movie. A public school uses a program called PAID where students can earn points for positive behavior. Two other public school counselors have been doing activities with students out of a book called *Bully Free Zone*. One public school counselor explained that her school has a boys group that is meeting weekly, "like a big brother because a lot of them don't have males in their household. And so he's teaching them values and stuff like that. So and he's teaching them the steps that if somebody gets them into trouble the steps to take to work it out. So it's working." The day before I met with one public school counselor, the school sent included bullying as a topic in their weekly letter sent home to parents, explaining

Other school programs aren't necessarily targeting bullying, but respondents mentioned these when considering what their schools are doing to become bully-free. Three of the private school counselors said that their schools were using an advisory system where teaching and counseling staff act as advisors for a small number of students and can address problems as they arise. Another private school counselor mentioned a focus program where one teacher works one on one 5 days a week with students who have "social difficulties." One respondent that works at a private school meets with all of the students by the end of their 5th grade year as a supportive measure and attends a weekly support services meetings with the deans, the nurse, and the learning specialists to discuss any students that they are concerned about.

Respondents had varying opinions on the effectiveness of these programs and on bullying interventions in general. A private school counselor explained that her individual approach, unlike the most bullying intervention programs, centers on victims:

I think my role is . . . I'm really a big believer that it's important to work with the child that is also being victimized and how did that make you feel and what could you have done differently to get out of the situation or to handle the situation. What you could have done in response? Could you have gone to the teacher or is this something that you feel you needed to handle? So helping also that child take responsibility for the piece of it even if it is unwanted but really what they could have done to get out of the situation so they're prepared for other situations that are gonna come up.

With the exception of the book *Bully Free Zone*, which two respondents used for programming and intervention strategies, none of the respondents used the same bullying intervention program materials. Intervention techniques varied greatly among the respondents but in general private school counselors tended to be involved in most if not all bullying situations and treated bullying situations on a case-by-case basis. Public school counselors' involvement tended to vary from not being involved very often to always being involved. Public school counselors' treatment of bullying situations was in general more dependent on school policy and protocol than it was by the private school counselors.

Students Labeled as Bullies

When talking about students labeled as bullies, respondents were asked about common characteristics, triggers, environmental factors, and how parents/guardians are involved. Respondents were also asked if there are any common characteristics of parents/guardians of students labeled as bullies. Although there were some common trends, responses tended to vary. The following is divided into two subsections:

common characteristics of students labeled as bullies and involvement of parents/guardians of students labeled as bullies.

Common Characteristics of Students Labeled as Bullies

When describing common characteristics of students labeled as bullies, half (n=6) of the respondents said that these students had "low self esteem." Other descriptive terms used were:

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| "mean spirited" | "bigger and stronger" |
| "insecure" | "evil face" |
| "depressed" | "brighter" |
| "at-risk" | "savvy" |
| "center of attention" | "manipulative" |
| "seek control or power" | "high verbal intelligence" |
| "want to be popular" | |

Some respondents talked about what types of things may be triggering bullying behavior in students. Half of the respondents discussed the bullying behavior as stemming from home, whether their "attachment is not secure," they "don't have as much guidance at home," they come "from aggressive homes or sibling situations," or that their families are involved in gang activity. Three private school counselors mentioned that bullies tended to be engaging in bullying behavior as a way of "social climbing" or becoming more popular. One counselor at a private school mentioned that she has seen bullies grow out of their behavior: "I've seen the nicest kids to mean things in MS and again I think that's really normal. If I saw the same thing in an 18 year old I would be worried."

A private school counselor mentioned that "there are 3 kids that contribute to 75% of our problems probably in each grade" and talked about a case example that illustrated his point that bullies can be intelligent and socially savvy:

Certainly one of the kids that I'm thinking about that we have the most problems with likes to, you know, like in a classic sense, you know she's only 12 but she's a borderline, to me that's who she is. She's gonna grow up and become a nice healthy borderline so she's looking to start problems and is that type of person that would want to be the center of attention, want people talking about them and want to talk about other people and they want a gang of kids to run up and "Did you hear about this thing?" And "Of course I did, I started the rumor!" You know so they know what's going on.

Although respondents' responses about characteristics of children labeled as bullies varied greatly, it is interesting to note that the most common characteristic that was brought up was "low self esteem." Terms like "manipulative," "savvy," and "brighter" were also mentioned several times and suggest that children labeled as bullies are generally viewed as more intelligent than the average child.

Involvement of Parents/Guardians of Students who are Labeled as Bullies

Respondents' responses varied when asked if there were common characteristics of parents/guardians of bullies. Six of the twelve respondents labeled parents/guardians of bullies as "defensive" and four respondents thought that there were no common characteristics. At least three counselors recalled case examples of bullies whose parents were also aggressive. Many of the respondents came up with negative words to describe parents/guardians of bullies. The following are words and phrases that respondents used to describe parents/guardians of bullies:

"Aggressive"

"Demanding"

"Tough"

"Protective"

"Bad attitude"

"Guarded"

In contrast, one respondent described parents/guardians of bullies as being mostly "cooperative." A private school counselor said, "I have parents you know who will justify their kids' behavior, but it's rare or less common than they other type who are like appalled." Another private school counselor had a similar experience. Two public school counselors talked about the difficulty of involving parents/guardians, especially from single-parent households. Other counselors' responses varied discussing parental involvement. One public school counselor said that they never involve parents unless it is a physical incident. Another public school counselor said, "we don't know the parents, they don't come." Similarly, a private school counselor discussed the non-involvement of some parents, but for a very different reason: " I think sometimes unfortunately because it's an expensive school families are like, well we're paying you so fix the kid."

Most counselors agreed that whether or not parents get a call is "based on the severity of the incident." One private school counselor explained, "I'm about trying to keep parents out of it on a low level, you know but on kids that are repeated (parents are involved)."

While responses varied about common characteristics of parents/guardians whose children were labeled as bullies, there was a general sense that parents/guardians in private school settings were more involved when bullying incidents occurred than parents/guardians in public school settings.

Students Labeled as Victims

Respondents were asked the same questions about students labeled as victims, including if there are any common characteristics of students labeled as victims, how parents/guardians of victims are involved when a bullying incident occurs, and to discuss

common characteristics of parents/guardians of victims. Again, responses varied, but certainly reflected differences in the responses respondents had given about children labeled as bullies. This section is split into the following subsections: Common characteristics of students labeled as victims and involvement of parents/guardians of students labeled as victims.

Common Characteristics of Students Labeled as Victims

As expected, descriptive terms that respondents used to discuss students labeled as victims of bullying differed from those used to describe children who are labeled as bullies. Interestingly, respondents seemed to come up with more descriptive terms for victims than they had for bullies. At least two respondents came up with each of the following:

"different"

"low self esteem"

"no self-confidence"

"academically slower"

Other terms and phrases used to describe victims include the following:

"awkward"

"tendency to follow instead of

"less socially savvy"

lead"

"unique"

"timid"

"vulnerable"

"less physical build"

"outsider"

"have a little sugar in their tanks"

"lacking certain social skills"

"weaker"

"anxious"

"isolated"

"don't feel secure"

"quiet"

In general, most respondents agreed that students labeled as victims "don't fit the norm either in how they look, how they talk, how they act." One respondent thought that sometimes victims and bullies shared the same characteristics, "just the way that they fight back is different." One public school counselor talked about how students who are labeled as victims are often involved in theatre in his school and said, " Yeah, they're a little sweet and the kids pick on them if they're sweet." Two private school counselors said that often times students are targeted as victims of bullying due to "changing dynamics" that occur in the 5th grade after students were in the same friend group in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade because " popularity is starting to be based on different things." A public school teacher put parental involvement into the equation, stating that a " kid whose parent might not come in "tends to be more of a target than a student whose parent is involved." Another public school counselor brought up the same issue, stating that a protective factor in his school is if the student's family is well known in the neighborhood.

It is interesting to note that more respondents agreed on the common characteristics of children labeled as victims than they did about common characteristics of children labeled as bullies. The term "different" was used many times to describe children labeled as victims and there was a general sense that victims tend to be social outliers. Private school counselors tended to talk more about the shifting of social friend groups from elementary to middle school, whereas at least two public school counselors mentioned family involvement as a characteristic that could either protect or put a victim at risk.

Involvement of Parents/Guardians of Students Labeled as Victims

Similarly to responses about involvement about parents/guardians of students labeled as bullies, respondents' responses about parents/guardians of students labeled as victims diverged. Three respondents (all public school counselors) did not feel like they could generalize characteristics or responses of parents/guardians of victims. Others used terms and phrases used to describe this population that included:

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| "panicky" | "open" |
| "needy" | "over functioning" |
| "angry" | "outraged" |
| "confused" | "upset" |
| "hurt" | "in denial" |
| "frustrated" | "unrealistic expectations" |
| "want to cooperate" | |

In general, most respondents were more understanding of the feelings that parents/guardians of victims had regarding their child being bullied. Some brought up similarities between the parents/guardians and their children being victimized. One respondent explained, "it brings up a lot of their own experiences in middle school and it's really hard to see your kid struggling and being a target, and so it's doubly hard." Another counselor agreed, stating "sometimes I think you can see a lot of similarities and sometimes you can listen to them about their experiences as a child." In contrast, one respondent said, "some parents have been upset at their child for not standing up for themselves." One public counselor stated that he felt that parents/guardians of victims,

like parents/guardians of bullies, "Are not giving the kind of attention to the kid that they need. Bottom line. They're not with them, they're not giving them support."

In terms of involvement, three respondents stated that parents/guardians of victims of bullying are made aware of every bullying incident that occurs. One stated that if it is a physical bullying incident, parents/guardians are called right away. Two private school counselors expressed sentiment about not wanting to involve parents/guardians of victims in every bullying incident. One counselor explained, "probably the best thing is for a parent to sympathize and but then to say, 'You need to figure this out. You need to navigate your own social way and figure this out.'" Another counselor said:

So while I always want to notify the parents, I'm not always looking for the parent to fly in here and take over and you know, some parents swoop in and take over. But I think that I try to mitigate that by being on the phone with them and saying well you know this is what happened and . . . we want to see your child find a way find their way . . . Like, "Yes it is upsetting, we're gonna get through it." As opposed to, "Yes it is upsetting and I'm gonna go to the school right now and that kid (the bully) is gonna get thrown out on their ass."

He later added, "part of their (victims) being picked on is due to a lack of assertiveness that when the parents come down, it's not helping them. Maybe that's why they have that in the first place, who knows?"

In general, counselors expressed more empathy towards parents/guardians of victims than they did towards parents/guardians of bullies. Private school counselors seemed to have less difficulty coming up with common characteristics of parents/guardians of children labeled as victims than public school counselors. The majority of the public school counselors did not feel that they could generalize these characteristics. Involvement came up as an issue for several private school counselors, in

terms of parents/guardians wanting to become too involved when their child was a victim of bullying, whereas this issue did not come up with the public school counselors.

Counselor Experience and Training

All respondents were asked if they had received any training which has helped them to better understand the experiences of bullies and their victims, or which has helped them to be better prepared to intervene with both. Surprisingly eight of the twelve respondents had never received any training on bullying. Some explained that they had been to workshops that talked about bullying but none that they would consider a "formal training." Four respondents stated that they had participated in at least one training or workshop on bullying. One interesting piece that came up around this question was that three of the private school counselors mentioned having access to a monthly consultants group that is similar to peer supervision, where they meet with other private school counselors and psychologists and talk about issues like bullying. In contrast, three of the five public school counselors expressed frustration and feelings of isolation over never being able to get together with other school counselors to talk about issues that come up. One respondent explains that in previous years "we usually got together all of us and we would share experiences of what happened and you 'd talk about significant things that might happen. Now we're just out there, you're just out there trying to do your best."

In summary, the majority of the respondents had never attended any training on bullying intervention. The majority of the private school counselors mentioned having a supportive space where they could at least get together and talk about bullying with other colleagues, while the majority of the public school counselors stated that they did not have such a space. Moreover, several of the public school counselors expressed a desire

to have such a space and disappointment that the NYC Department of Education has discontinued these types of counselor meetings. Generally, public school counselor respondents expressed more discontent about supports they were receiving in their efforts to deal with bullying than private school counselor respondents.

Summary

This chapter has presented findings from interviews with 12 middle school counselors who represented public, charter, and private school environments in the New York City area who had varying experiences with bullying. Respondents' responses indicated that there were both commonalities and differences with the ways that bullying presented itself in different school environments. Responses indicated that all types of bullying occurred in all types of school environments, but that incidents were handled differently depending on administrative policies, disciplinary protocol, and the individual bias of school personnel handling bullying situations. Because responses about bullying incidents were completely based on the perspectives of the respondents, caution should be taken in making generalizations based on the data.

In analyzing the data that emerged on school settings, respondents perceived private school settings to be less diverse and to serve a student population with more socioeconomic resources than the populations served at public schools. Although perceptions about the neighborhood demographics where the schools were located varied, in general public schools were located in a demographic area that represented their respective student populations. Private schools tended to be located in more diverse neighborhoods that were not representative of the school's population. Responses varied greatly on school definitions and policies about bullying and most respondents were not

aware of their schools' policy or definition of bullying. With the exception of two respondents, most respondents felt that their school environment was generally protecting against bullying behavior. All agreed that environment played a role in both risk and protective factors of bullying, and included administrator and teacher attitudes as factors. Respondents' responses about their own definitions of bullying indicated that while there were some commonalities, few definitions were consistent with definitions that schools used. None of the respondents' definitions contained all three crucial elements of bullying defined by most researchers, which include repetition, harm, and an imbalance of power.

Respondents' perspectives on bullying incidents themselves also presented some commonalities and differences. All respondents considered physical bullying to be a rare occurrence, and commented that verbal bullying occurred more often. Private school counselors could generally come up with more specific instances of both relational and cyberbullying. Both of these types of bullying also occurred in the public school realm, but with less frequency according to respondents. Most respondents were able to acknowledge the presence of diversity issues in bullying incidents but responses varied greatly about how diversity issues intersected with bullying. Intervention strategies also varied across settings, with private school counselors tending to be involved in more bullying incidents and to treat them on an individual case-by-case basis, whereas public school counselors' interventions depended on school policy and disciplinary protocol.

An analysis of data on respondents' perspectives about characteristics of students labeled as bullies and victims and of parents/guardians of students in both of these categories revealed that in general, bullies were viewed as more intelligent and victims

were viewed as outsiders. Perspectives on parent/guardian involvement for both bullies and victims exemplified that private school parents were consistently more involved than public school parents. Lastly, most respondents stated that they had not received any formal training on bullying intervention, but private school counselors revealed that most did have access to professional supervision groups where they could receive support for dealing with bullying incidents, whereas public school counselors did not have access to this type of support. Moreover, some public school counselors expressed frustration about the lack of support that they are receiving from their administrators and the Department of Education. These findings have shown that despite differences in perceptions about how bullying is presenting itself in different school environments, school counselors' can offer useful perspectives and play an important role in dealing with bullying behavior.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study explored the perceptions of 12 middle school counselors about their observations of bullying behavior that was occurring in their respective schools. A review of the literature revealed that bullying can take on many forms, including physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying. Research has also shown that factors contributing to bullying behavior can be numerous, including individual behavior, attachment patterns, familial interactions, school environments, and community environments. For the purposes of this study, ecological systems theory and social development model were used as theoretical bases to develop qualitative interview questions that address all different types of contextual factors. There is a lack of current research about counselors' perceptions of bullying, despite counselors playing an integral role in dealing with bullying behavior in their schools. This study attempts to address that gap and focuses on counselors working in different types of middle schools, including public, private, and charter schools.

Literature and Data

The way bullying incidents are handled by counselors, school administrators, and even communities depends largely on the definition of bullying being used. According to Christie-Mizell (2003, p. 237), "bullying is defined as physical, psychological, and/or verbal intimidation or attack that is meant to cause distress and/or harm to an intended victim." Most researchers agree that bullying must contain three crucial elements to be

considered bullying behavior, including repetition, harm, and unequal power (Berger, 2007). Respondents' personal definitions of bullying varied greatly, and some provided clearer definitions than others, but few mentioned all three crucial elements in their definitions. The lack of clarity in some of the respondents' definitions of bullying behavior became evident when asked about the different types of bullying. When asked about relational bullying, some respondents stated that it did not occur at their schools, but then when discussing specific incidents described a bullying situation that fit the Crick and Grotpeter (1995) definition as "harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships." A few respondents made statements like, "I don't know if this is bullying, but . . ." and then would describe a situation that contained the elements of repetition, harm, and unequal power. This is significant in that researchers have pointed to negative implications of adults not recognizing bullying behavior, namely that when a child tells an adult about a bullying situation and the adult does not recognize the situation as bullying, it can invalidate the feelings of the child, making them less likely to tell the adult the next time a similar situation occurs Mishna (2004). Jacobson & Bauman's (2007) research corroborates this finding and states that in their findings counselors perceived physical and verbal bullying as more serious than relational bullying.

If counselors' definitions of bullying were somewhat lacking in consistency, respondents' perceptions of their schools' definitions of bullying were even more variable. Definitions were wide-ranging, from any type of harassment to no definition at all. Most respondents were not aware of their schools' definitions of bullying and stated that their school had no formal policy on bullying. This could be in part due to the fact that so few

of the schools actually defined bullying behavior. This could be in part due to the fact that there is no national policy on bullying behavior. According to Bully Police USA, an organization that advocates for antibullying laws, New York received an "F" grade, being one of thirteen states that has no antibullying legislation that would provide a definition of bullying. The implication here is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to implement an antibullying policy if bullying behavior itself is not defined. Findings showed that school policies on bullying behavior were also varying, with very few schools having a formal policy on addressing bullying. Of the few that did mention having a policy, there was inconsistency about whether or not the policy was actually followed. A couple of respondents mentioned a "zero-tolerance" policy but also stated that bullying situations were handled on a case-by-case basis. It should be noted that data about school policy was based on the respondents' perspectives and that this could affect the accuracy of the data depending on how familiar respondents are with their respective schools' policies.

Other interesting findings came up around school environment and factors that may contribute to or protect against bullying behavior. The idea of adults as role models and administrators as helping or getting in the way of creating a bully free environment came up several times in respondents' interviews. In addition to Mishna (2004), who claims that victims may stop telling adults about their victimization if they are not validated, Bauman (2008) states "social learning is a powerful process, and when children see role models (e.g., parents and other adults, including teachers) use bullying and intimidation tactics, they use these approaches to getting their own needs met and solving problems." In other words, research has shown that school personnel have a

powerful position in both their functions of acting as role models, and intervening in bullying situations.

There were some general differences in responses on this topic from public and private school counselors. Respondents who worked at private schools generally felt that their administrators were supportive of their efforts to intervene in bullying behavior. Public school counselor responses varied, with many respondents viewing their administrative staff as supportive but a few mentioning that this had been an issue. One respondent in particular felt that a school administrator was a bully to teachers and the students picked up on this behavior and emulated it. Respondents also talked about teacher bias with respect to reporting and dealing with bullying behavior, mentioning that in many bullying situations, teachers made the initial decision about whether or not to intervene and report the situation to other school personnel, including counselors. While subjective bias of teachers (and counselors) is an unavoidable factor in the handling of bullying situations, a clear school definition of bullying would help teachers, administrators, and counselors get on the same page about interventions.

Orpenas and Horne (2006) also contend school environments that have a positive climate, encourage positive relationships between teachers and students, provide high levels of supervision, have clear policies against bullying and foster excellence in teaching are protecting against bullying behavior in their school. While most schools strive for this type of environment, it was clear that most respondents did not feel that their schools had clear policies against bullying. Many respondents also mentioned that bullying situations tended to occur when there was a lack of supervision, like during gym or after school. In general, respondents who felt that their schools were doing a good job

handling different types of bullying situations talked about positive relationships between teachers and students and between administrators and school personnel. If positive school climate is considered a protective factor against bullying, one might argue that the private schools, with more space, updated buildings and equipment, and more resources, foster a positive school climate.

Ecological systems theory and social development model both state that an individual must be understood within the context of the multiple systems within his or her environment. A review of the literature revealed that most research on bullying has focused on one context at a time, such as individual, intrapersonal, familial, community, etc. These contexts include an individual's biological tendencies, attachment patterns, peer relationships, or school and community environment as contributing or protecting factors against bullying behavior. It is important to examine how these contextual environments interact with each other as well in order to understand bullying behavior in each singular context. Respondents were asked about the neighborhood where their school was located and the neighborhood environments where students who attended the schools lived. There were some interesting findings based on some stark differences between public and private school environments. Most of the private schools were located in diverse neighborhoods, but the majority of students attending these schools lived outside of the immediate neighborhood. Obviously then, it was difficult for private school counselors to draw conclusions about the impact of the neighborhoods that their student body represented. In contrast, the vast majority of public school students in New York attend schools that are in the neighborhoods where they live because of zoning laws. Public school counselors' perceptions of the neighborhoods where their schools are

located (and where the majority of their student population live) varied, but many mentioned that poverty and gang activity were major concerns and influences. Although relatively few studies have addressed this, Espelage, Bosworth, and Simon (2000) found that neighborhood safety concerns were strongly correlated with bullying behavior. It is not possible to make generalizations from this study about how students' neighborhood environments affects bullying behavior, but it is worth pointing out that according to respondents in this study, this was an issue affecting public school students more so than one affecting private school students.

Generalizations about different types of bullying e.g. physical, verbal, relational, or cyberbullying, occurring in different types of school settings cannot be gleaned from this study, both because of the small sample, and because trends were not evident. However, the findings suggest the possibility that there are differences between public school students and private school students in access to technology that may affect occurrences of cyberbullying. All private school counselor respondents were familiar with cyberbullying and with the exception of one respondent, believed that cyberbullying was occurring at their school. Although most of the public school counselors had heard of cyberbullying, a significant number did not believe that it was occurring at their school. One counselor pointed out that computers and cell phones are "luxuries" that most of the student population that attended that specific public school could not afford. Cyberbullying has received a lot of attention in the media recently because of some well-publicized cases. It would be interesting to find out how cyberbullying is related to issues of privilege and access.

Relational bullying is another type of bullying that has been researched extensively in recent years. Some studies, such as that of Crick, Grotpeter, and Bigbee, (2002) have indicated that girls are more relationally aggressive than are boys. Findings from this study did not corroborate this claim. Respondents implicated both boys and girls in relational bullying incidents, although some counselors mentioned that they thought girls bullied more than boys in general in their schools. In most cases reported by respondents relational bullying was same gender, but in a few cases relational bullies targeted the opposite gender. Most respondents who mentioned relational and cyberbullying talked about how these forms of bullying are more difficult to deal with. This was consistent with literature that has also made this claim.

Studies cited in the literature review chapter were organized around clear definitions of different types of bullying, e.g. physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying. This researcher found that respondents did not perceive bullying situations in their schools to conform to clear definitions by the type of bullying being displayed. Many respondents talked about bullying situations as repetitive, which is one of the crucial elements, and that bullying situations tended to encompass more than one form of bullying. For example, verbal bullying can escalate into physical bullying. One respondent mentioned a physical fight that broke out after a cyberbullying incident the night before. Many of the cyberbullying incidents mentioned by respondents also fit the definition of relational bullying. This researcher has yet to find research that reflects these complications with types of bullying, and would argue that based on respondents' responses, real life bullying situations are complex and cannot always be classified by type.

Another interesting finding was that in some ongoing bullying situations, respondents had difficulty identifying who was the "bully" and who was the "victim." In a situation where both parties are acting aggressively towards each other on an ongoing basis, the elements of harm and repetition are clearly there. But if one of the crucial elements to bullying behavior is unequal power, it may be useful to point out that in some cases the definition of power and the subjective understanding of the observer about who has power could be confusing and difficult to sort out.

One area of interest for this researcher was how issues of diversity play out in bullying situations. Respondents' statements to whether or not issues of diversity played out in bullying behavior at their schools varied and followed no particular pattern. These findings suggest that no generalizations can be made about how diversity issues present themselves either in types of bullying incidents or types of school settings. However, respondents did comment on issues such as staff diversity that does not reflect the diversity of the student body. This could have serious implications on school personnel bias and how bullying gets subjectively reported. Leff et al. (1999) found that African-American bullies were more likely to be identified than bullies of other ethnicities. One respondent who was a private school counselor talked about this being an issue at the private school and that more students of color are targeted for negative behavior than White students.

Many respondents also mentioned that students get bullied for being "gay," even though in most cases students being victimized have not identified as gay. Research presented by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network based on a 2007 National School Climate Survey revealed that students who identify as LGBT are generally

harassed more than and that the majority feel unsafe at school. In light of the recent suicides in April 2009 of two 11-year-old boys who were bullied for being gay, these statistics are significant. Research on adolescent development suggests that middle school can be a time of stressful transitions and low self esteem. One respondent stated that in middle school "gay" is the most offensive term and is often used to put people down. For LGBT students, whether or not they have identified themselves as such, being targeted in this way could most certainly have an effect on self-esteem and ego functions.

There were other differences that presented themselves in respondents' statements according to whether or not they worked in public or private schools. Although no generalizations can be made based on data retrieved about respondents' perceptions of common characteristics of bullies, victims, and the parents/guardians of both, family involvement was a factor that presented itself differently in the public and private school realms. Much research has been done on attachment patterns and family interaction patterns as factors that contribute to bullying, but very little research focuses on how families might get involved after a bullying situation has already occurred. Many public school counselors talked about neighborhood and family influences as contributing factors to bullying behavior, but many also talked about family involvement as a protective factor. One respondent explained that if a bully knows the family of the victim will stick up for him/her and become involved in the bullying situation, he/she is less likely to bully that particular student. Public school counselors also talked about it being difficult to get many families to come into the school and be involved. Private school counselors also talked about family involvement, but much differently. Most private school counselors mentioned that families are very involved in their schools and that

sometimes an over-involved parent/guardian can be a contributing factor to bullying. One respondent explained that parents who "swoop" in and try to fix bullying situations are probably perpetuating the situation by not allowing their child to learn the skills to avoid being victimized.

Another disparity in the findings between public and private school respondents was related to counselor support in their respective environments. In general, private school counselor respondents had much more access to support meetings, resources, and materials on bullying behavior than public school counselors. Many public school counselors expressed frustration over the discontinuation of monthly meetings where counselors could get together and address bullying (among other) issues. According to Jacobson & Bauman (2007), counselors with more antibullying training were more prepared to deal with all forms of bullying. While the majority of the respondents did not have formal training on bullying, the fact that private school counselors had more access to support around bullying than did the public school counterparts is significant. This also has implications for interventions, which are by nature subjective and can be more effective when counselors have a toolkit of knowledge to work with.

Limitations

Although the sample was diverse in its years of experience and presented a fairly balanced representation of public and private schools, this study is limited in that the sample size was small with only 12 respondents. Geographically respondents represented schools from all over the New York City area, but not from all 5 boroughs, and several of the boroughs were overrepresented. It was this researcher's hope to provide a more geographically inclusive perspective but the small sample size, time limits, and snowball

sample method used proved to be limitations to this end. The snowball sample method impacted the sample in that this researcher could not target schools directly based on desired criteria. It should also be noted that the sample represented an urban area with one school district, so that an even broader perspective on the issue of bullying could have been presented if schools in suburban and rural areas had been represented along with more school districts.

Although not intentional, researcher bias influenced decisions about what questions to ask and the decision to explore and clarify some questions by asking follow up questions. Environmental settings, mostly when interviews occurred at school locations, proved to be limiting when interruptions occurred. Time constraints were also limiting in that some respondents had more time to explore their answers than others.

Another possible limitation is that all data is based on the perceptions of respondents, and so information about specific demographic numbers and policies may not always reflect all available information. Because of the small scope of this study, a quantitative study that examines perspectives of a larger sample representing different school districts and diverse areas including suburban and rural settings might yield results that provide a broader perspective of these issues. However this study was intended to present an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of middle school counselors who are working in school settings in the New York City area about how bullying presents itself in their schools.

Implications for Practice

Some of the findings that have been discussed here include the importance of basing interventions on a clear definition of bullying, the complicated nature of different

types of bullying and how they present themselves, how issues of diversity come to play in bullying situations, family involvement as a protective or contributing factor to bullying, and disparities between public and private school settings in how bullying both presents itself and is handled. Because this study has been exploratory in nature, it is difficult to synthesize all of the data into one or two main points that will inform implications for practice. However this study provides a stepping-stone for further research on counselors' perspectives on bullying. There are also a number of other directions that further research could take from this study, including an examination of family responses to bullying behavior, an analysis of how staff diversity affects bullying behavior and the reporting of bullying incidents, the effects of neighborhood safety concerns on bullying behavior, and definitions of power in the bullying relationship.

School counselors are on the front lines in combating bullying behavior and ensuring that all children are safe at school. All counselors should be required to be trained to recognize and intervene when bullying behavior occurs. Policies, whether school specific, or implemented on a state or even federal level, should always contain a clear definition of bullying so that every bullying situation is taken seriously. If one main point can be taken away from this study, it is that bullying occurs in multiple environmental contexts that are interrelated and influencing each other. Solid interventions should be based on this knowledge and take all environmental contexts into account. Trained social workers are often in a unique position to have access to understand these multiple environmental contexts, whether working at schools or in agencies, with individual students, or entire communities.

Conclusion

School bullying is an issue that deserves attention in order to ensure that all children in our school system are safe. Although much research has been done on the issue, it continues to be an area ripe for research because of gaps in the current literature and the ever-changing nature of bullying behavior due to technological advances that allow for children to interact in ways that not available to them in previous generations. School bullying is a particularly critical issue in the field of social work in that social workers often deal with the consequences of bullying behavior with individuals, families, and school communities. This study has attempted to add to the dearth of research on what is known about counselors' perspectives on bullying behavior. Findings from this study have confirmed previous research that has shown that there is variation in the way schools in the United States are responding to bullying behavior, and that counselors who have received antibullying training are better equipped to manage and intervene in bullying behavior. Implications for social work practice include involvement and coordination of people from multiple environmental contexts when bullying behavior occurs, including parents/guardians, teachers, school administrators, community leaders, and policy makers. It is this researcher's hope that further studies will continue to inform antibullying intervention practices and that this research will encourage national lawmakers to take this issue seriously and create legislation to protect all young people in school systems across the United States.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Research Respondent,

My name is Beth Zacher, and I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a study of middle school counselors' perceptions of bullying that occurs in their schools. This research study for my thesis is being conducted as part of the requirements for the Master of Social Work degree at Smith College School for Social Work and future presentations and publications.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you have experience working as a middle school counselor and are currently counseling on a middle school site in the New York City area. As a respondent, it is understood that you have at least three years experience in your field.

If you choose to participate, I will ask you to sit for a taped interview with me that will last approximately 60 minutes. Prior to the interview you will be asked to answer a few demographic questions. The interview itself will consist of semi-structured questions focusing on your experience when working with students in your schools who have been identified as bullies or victims. I will travel to your job site to conduct the interview or will meet you at some other mutually agreed-upon location that is private and convenient for you.

All interviews will be kept confidential, data in this thesis and professional publications or presentations will be presented in the aggregate without reference to identifying information. After the interview, I will refer to our audio-taped conversation by code numbers instead of by your name.

While there will be no financial benefit for taking part in the study, participation will allow you to share your knowledge and experience about school bullying. Your contributions will provide important information that may be helpful in furthering the knowledge of the causes and effects of bullying in both victims and bullies and the different types of bullying that occur in different school environments. You may benefit knowing that you are contributing your knowledge and expertise about techniques that can be adopted by counselors and social workers working in the school setting, whether public, private, or charter.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST IN PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY.

PLEASE CONTACT ME OR ALLOW ME TO CONTACT YOU AT YOUR CONVENIENCE TO DISCUSS SCHEDULING AN INTERVIEW.

Appendix B

Screening Interview Guide

1. How long have you been a school counselor?
2. Please describe the type of middle school where you work. (Public, private, independent, charter, religious affiliation, etc.)
3. How long have you been counseling at this school?
4. What is your gender?
5. How do you identify racially, ethnically or culturally?
6. Please describe the demographic composition of your school's student population.
7. Please describe the demographic composition of the neighborhood where your school is located.

Appendix C

Human Subjects Review Approval Letter

January 15, 2009

Elizabeth Zacher

Dear Beth,

You revised materials have been reviewed and all is now in order. There is just one very small correction needed. In the Informed Consent, you say “the audio files will be destroyed after three years. All of the data and materials pertaining to the study have to be destroyed or kept secure if they continue to be needed after that time and then destroyed when no longer needed.

Please just add that all materials will be destroyed and send that page to Laurie Wyman for your permanent file.

We are glad to give final approval to your study, assuming you will make this important correction in your Consent.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Victoria Winbush, Research Advisor

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Dear Potential Research Respondent:

My name is Beth Zacher. I am conducting a study of middle school counselors' perceptions of bullying that occurs in their schools. This research study for my thesis is being conducted as part of the requirements for the Master of Social Work degree at Smith College School for Social Work and future presentations and publications.

Your participation is requested because you are a middle school counselor. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a 45-minute interview in person about bullying at your school, which you can refuse. Also, I will ask you to provide demographic information about yourself. Interviews will be tape recorded with your consent, and tapes will be coded numerically to ensure your confidentiality. After three years have passed, tapes will be destroyed. If I use a transcriber, he/she will sign a confidentiality pledge.

The potential risk of participating in this study may be that some questions could trigger uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. In case you feel the need for additional support after participating in this study, you will be given a list of resources for mental health services in your area.

You will receive no financial benefit for your participation in this study. However, you may benefit from knowing that you have contributed to what is known about bullying intervention strategies. It is my hope that this study will help social workers and school personnel have a better understanding of how to treat bullying in the school environment.

Strict confidentiality will be maintained, as consistent with federal regulations and the mandates of the social work profession. Your identity will be protected, as names and identifying information will be changed in the reporting of the data. Your name will never be associated with the information you provide in the survey or the interview. The data may be used in other education activities as well as in the preparation for my Master's thesis. Your confidentiality will be protected by coding the information and storing the data in a locked file for a minimum of three years and after three years it will be destroyed unless I continue to need it in which case it will be kept secured.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer specific questions and to withdraw from the study at any time before March 1, 2009. If you decide to withdraw, all materials pertaining to you will be immediately destroyed. If you have additional questions about the study or wish to withdraw, please feel free to contact me at the contact information below. If you have any concerns about your rights or about any aspect of the study, I encourage you to call me or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Beth Zacher

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

SIGNATURE OF RESPONDENT

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

DATE

DATE

Please return this consent form to me prior to the interview to indicate your intention of participating in the study (I suggest that you keep a copy of this consent form for your records). Thank you for your time, and I greatly look forward to having you as a respondent in my study.

Appendix E

Interview Guide

1. How do you define bullying?
2. How does the school define bullying?
3. How often does physical bullying occur at your school? Can you describe a situation?
4. How often does verbal bullying occur at your school? Can you describe a situation?
5. How often does relational bullying occur at your school? Can you describe a situation?
6. How often does cyberbullying occur at your school? Can you describe a situation?
7. What types of bullying do you think your school is most prepared/least prepared to deal with?
8. How do you see bullying behavior relate to issues of diversity? Race? Gender? Language? Disability?
9. What is the policy of your school in addressing bullying behavior? Does your school have a formal policy?
10. What aspects of your school's environment do you feel may be inadvertently helping to trigger bullying behavior/ what aspects may be helping to protect students against bullying behavior?
11. What is the protocol for intervention when a bullying behavior incident occurs? Are you involved in all of the bullying instances?
12. How are administrators helping or getting in the way of creating a bully-free environment?
13. From your perspective, what are the characteristics of children who are labeled as bullies?
14. From your perspective, what are the characteristics of children who are labeled as victims of bullying?
15. How are parents/guardians involved when their child exhibits bullying behavior?
16. How are parents/guardians involved when their child is identified as a victim of bullying?
17. Are there common characteristics of parents/guardians of bullies? If so, what are they?
18. Are there common characteristics of parents/guardians of victims of bullying? If so, what are they?
19. Describe any training you have received which has helped you to better understand the experiences of bullies and their victims, and which has helped you to be better prepared to intervene with both.