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A Phenomenological Study of Middle School Counselors' Perceptions of Effective Bullying Prevention and Intervention

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELORS'
PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctorate of Education

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Tragic acts of violence in and around schools across the nation have increased the need to understand bullying behaviors and acts of aggression, as they are often cited as the reason for these heartbreaks. Schools work to prevent these situations from happening and intervene with fairness and discipline when they occur, and as a result, the duties of a school counselor has changed from a primarily academic focus to one which now includes assessing the social and emotional stability of the students with whom they work.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the phenomenon of bullying and what middle school counselors from western Pennsylvania perceive as effective philosophies of intervention and prevention for the bully, the victim, and the bystander. After evaluating the data received from semi-structured one-on-one interviews, recommendations were made for intervention philosophies for the bully, the victim and the bystander. Additionally, recommendations were made for various strategies and programs that can be implemented in schools by administrators, teachers and other stakeholders. These strategies aligned with the ideas presented in three distinctive philosophies of intervention and prevention, Bandura's Social Learning Theory or a comprehensive (school, family, and community) approach, the common group theory

otherwise known as a socio-cultural phenomenon where students of like behavior are provided the opportunity to work together, and individual interventions through a person-centered approach.

Although a public focus on bullying is apparent, the results from this study indicated a lack of training and professional development opportunities for counselors and school staff. All participants shared a need for increased education for students, parents, teachers and the school community regarding the difference between bullying and conflict. There also was a collective belief that the expansion of technology has led to increased cyber-bullying and cyber-conflict that is impacting students on a regular basis. The relationship between the school counselor and administration was viewed as a critical component to any bullying prevention or intervention philosophy being successful.

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I knew I wanted to be an educator at a very early age. I was the one who gathered all the children in the neighborhood to sit in front of my chalkboard on wheels while I taught them how to read and do simple math problems. My grandmother always told me that teaching was perfect for me because, “I was getting paid to tell people what to do.” Teaching is perfect for me, maybe not for the reason she suggested, but for the lives I have had the opportunity to impact. When I began this program, I was asked why I was doing this, and my answer was simple. I wanted to show my students that if a small town girl from Liberty Borough who grew up in a single parent household can do this, then so can they. Yes, it was hard, and long, and tedious, but I am proud of what I have completed, proud to be able to share my story, and proud to be a role model for others who might follow in my path.

All of this would have never been possible without the constant love, encouragement, gentle prodding, and support of my husband, Ed. Allowing me to pursue my passion means more to me than I can ever express in words. Thank you and I love you with all of my heart. Jake and MacKenzie, I hope that the two of you understand that the value of education never stops, no matter how old you are. I am so proud of the importance you both put on your own education, I promise you anything is possible and it is completely worth it. To my mom, your encouragement and praise throughout all of my life allowed me to get here. Your guidance and unconditional love has made the person I am today with the strength and confidence to be the best I can be.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
One	INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY	1
	Statement of the Problem.....	2
	Purpose Statement.....	6
	Research Questions.....	9
	Significance of the Study.....	10
	Interventions and Theoretical Position	11
	Social Learning Theory – Comprehensive (School, Family, and Community) Approach.....	12
	Common Group – Socio-Cultural Phenomenon	13
	Individual Interventions – A Person-Centered Approach	15
	Operational Definitions.....	17
	Limitations.....	17
	Summary.....	19
Two	REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	21
	Increase in School Violence.....	21
	Effects of Bullying.....	22
	Global Presence of Bullying	23
	Theories of Bullying	24
	A Discussion Regarding Theory	24
	Bandura’s Social Learning Theory.....	26
	Regenerative Shaming Theory and Bullying in Schools.....	27
	A Profile of the Bully.....	28
	Gender Difference in Bullying	30
	Additional Participants in the Bullying Spectrum	31
	Consequences for the Bully	31
	Effectiveness of Interventions.....	32
	A Profile of the Victim	33
	Characteristics of the Victim	33
	Consequences for the Victim.....	35
	Advocacy for the Victim.....	37
	A Profile of the Bully/Victim	39
	Characteristics of the Bully/Victim	39
	Advocacy for the Bully-Victim	41
	A Profile of the Bystander	42

Chapter	Page
	Impact of the Bystander on Bullying Behaviors.....42
	Impact on the Bystander as a Witness to Bullying Behaviors44
	Middle School Bullying Prevalence45
	Methods Used to Impact Aggressive Behaviors in Schools47
	Comprehensive (Social Learning Theory) Approach to Bully Prevention47
	Common Group – Socio-Cultural Phenomenon51
	Individual Interventions – A Person-Centered Approach.....53
	School Counselors and Bullying.....56
	Summary59
Three	METHODOLOGY62
	Statement of the Problem.....63
	Instrumentation64
	Research Questions66
	Population Sample and Research Setting66
	Pilot Study68
	Pilot Results.....69
	Interview.....70
	Research Procedures.....70
	Data Analysis73
	Summary75
Four	DATA ANALYSIS77
	Review of Interview Process, Data Collection, and Analysis78
	Participants’ Demographic Data78
	Teacher Responses to In-Depth Interview79
	Summary of Findings of Research Question 1 – Experiences with Bullying.....80
	Summary of Experiences with Bullying86
	Summary of Findings of Research Question 2 – Philosophies Of Intervention88
	Philosophies of Intervention for the Bystander111
	Summary of Philosophies of Intervention.....117
	Summary of Findings of Research Question 3 – Training and Impact of Intervention Strategies120
	Summary of Training and Impact of Intervention Strategies.....123
	Summary124

Chapter	Page
Five	SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS126
	Summary of Purpose of the Study.....128
	Summary of Research Methodology129
	Limitations.....130
	Conclusions131
	Summary of Findings for Research Question 1 – Experience with Bullying.....132
	Bullying vs. Conflict133
	Cyber-conflict and Cyber-bullying134
	Counselors’ Perceived Reasons for Bullying.....134
	Summary of Findings for Research Question 2 – Philosophies of Intervention136
	Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.....137
	Personalized Intervention Philosophies.....139
	Individualized Intervention Philosophies for the Victim, Bully, and Bystander140
	Summary of Findings for Research Question 3 – Training and Impact of Intervention142
	Recommendations142
	Opportunities for Future Research145
	Summary146
	REFERENCES149
	APPENDICES162
	Appendix A - Interview Protocol Questions.....162
	Appendix B - Administrator Consent Form.....164
	Appendix C - Letter to School Counselors165
	Appendix D - Informed Consent Form.....167

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Demographic Data for Counselor Participants.....	179

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

On April 20, 1999, two students entered Columbine High School armed with guns and explosives. The assault they waged on the students and staff caused panic among schools across America. Parents, teachers, and administrators demanded answers as they watched terrified students run from what was once their safe place. What caused two teenagers to perform such an act of terrorism against their peers? Did anyone see warning signs that could have averted this tragedy? The media, in an attempt to give the immediate answer that the public demanded, placed the blame on bullying and attempted to change the public's perception of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the students behind this tragedy, from monsters to victims (Cullen, 2009).

In the years since this tragedy, the word bullying had been forever engrained in the minds of parents, students, and educators (Cullen, 2009). April 9, 2014, brought this type of unthinkable event closer to home when a school violence incident occurred at Franklin Regional High School, which is about twenty miles east of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Alex Hribal, a 16-year-old student, allegedly pulled the fire alarm at his high school in an effort to flood the hallway with students and then proceeded to stab and slash multiple people as he raced through the hallways, armed with two kitchen knives. According to a local news report through the Pittsburgh news channel, WTAE, by Ashlie Hardway, Dr. Bruce Chambers testified in court that Hribal "was not bullied any more or less than any other teen, but his witnessing of other students being bullied made him want to change the world" (Hardway, 2014). In addition, Hribal was reported to have read everything he could on the Columbine tragedy, felt a personal connection with Eric

Harris and Dylan Klebold, and even watched a documentary on Columbine the night before the incident at Franklin Regional (2014). Considering this local act of violence was not directly related to a victim of bullying, but a bystander, or witness, to acts of aggression, stakeholders now are able to see that the effects of these behaviors are far more encompassing than once thought to be.

Although Alex Hribal is alive to be interviewed, testify, and give his reasons for what he was thinking and feeling up to and during his rampage; many of the students who were involved in school incidents do not live to tell their tale. Students have not only injured others, but also themselves, causing suicides to be a media topic with the cause looking toward victimization. Those who deal with bullying are also now realizing that the impact of being a bystander to bullying can be equally significant and substantial as directly receiving the aggression. As a result educators now search with renewed vigor for solutions to the problem of why some children bully, why some students observe the incident and do nothing, and why some who are bullied or witness bullying would take such extreme measures as killing their fellow students or even themselves.

Statement of the Problem

According to Olweus, bullying behavior is defined as an “imbalance of power between two individuals, where the stronger person causes repeated harm, albeit mental, emotional, or physical, to the weaker person” (Olweus, 2003). The person who causes this repeated harm is labeled the bully. On the contrary, a victim is one who experiences this type of hostile behavior continually (M. A. Harris, 2011). Additionally, a second type of “victim” is now recognized as another subgroup in the aggressive behavior dynamic. This type, labeled “bully-victim,” is a recipient of hostile behavior, but

contrary to the passive reaction of the victim, this person reacts in an aggressive manner toward the bully (M. A. Harris, 2011). Individuals who watch bullying or hear about it are labeled as bystanders (Hamburger, 2011). These labels, bully, victim, and bystander create the triad of the dynamic known broadly and collectively as bullying.

There is not an adolescent that is immune to potentially being a recipient of aggressive behaviors. Students younger than five and older than 18 still seem to feel the pain caused by being the recipient of this type of repetitive destructive behavior (Higher Education Center for Alcohol, 2012; Jansen, Veenstra, Ormel, Verhulst, and Reijneveld, 2011). It can occur in the classroom, on the soccer field, or on a social networking website. As a result, many students experience low self-esteem, depression, and an overall feeling of insecurity in any and all of these settings. Research has demonstrated that some students are considered to be at a higher risk for suicide as a result of receiving this constant victimization (Esbensen & Carson, 2009). Cyber bullying has added to this increase, with the verbal and mental assaults waged against these victims now entering their homes through computers and other electronic devices. As a result, many victims simply cannot escape the bully.

The victim is not the only person affected by a bully's aggressive behaviors. Those who watch bullying occur, the bystander, can feel "increased anxiety, guilt, and helplessness for not supporting the victim or confronting the bully" (Hamburger, 2011, p. 1). The additional stress placed on bystanders was indicated by Franklin Regional perpetrator Alex Hribal when he stated that "bullies were hypocrites." This perceived hypocrisy assisted in adding to his frustration over his own lack of friends or social group (Hardway, 2014). This perception is not to say that the bully is a well-adjusted

individual, who is immune to his or her own personal struggles as he or she continues into adulthood. Actually, quite the opposite has been reported. Bullies have an increased likelihood of drug use, criminal behavior, and overall long-term emotional problems (Hamburger, 2011; Roberts & Morotti, 2000). This social epidemic is widespread, and so are its effects on all students involved.

Zero tolerance policies have been created in schools across the United States in hopes to squelch bullying behavior. Students who bully are disciplined and at times faced with expulsion, as a result of their bullying behavior (Armistead, 2008). Even with these harsh discipline policies, bullying still exists. Since rules and disciplinary actions do not seem to have a strong impact on the bully (who often just redirects his or her aggression to another individual or acts out in a different way), there has to be additional explanations as to why bullying behavior does not stop. This conduct may be intrinsic, within the person, part of their make-up, or more simply, their personality. It also stands to reason that this behavior could be part of a larger social dynamic, where students who behave in a certain way do so while in larger groups of like-minded individuals. In the search to determine what causes bullies to act out in aggressive manners, those involved are also looking to see what causes victims to retreat, sometimes never taking a stand against the bully until a drastic measure of violence or self-harm occurs. Finally, and more recently, the bystander is coming into focus as another person who is caused additional duress simply by witnessing these types of situations, who does not feel empowered enough to support the victim, typically in fear of then turning into the recipient of the aggression.

School staff and officials are the people with whom our children spend a majority of their day. These people are also the first line of contact when a bullying situation arises within the school. Not only are they the people who witness the bullying behaviors, but also the ones charged with attempting to change the behavior. It seems that within the school setting, guidance counselors are the first line of communication with regards to these behaviors for the teachers, students, parents, and administrators. School counselors are charged with assisting these students in appropriately handling these situations, working through emotions that the bullies, victims, and bystanders face. School counselors have an additional area of knowledge, unique to their role, which is a greater level of understanding the emotional and psychological needs of these students. Their responsibilities also include working with parents to help come to a resolution of these occurrences and facilitating sessions between administrators and other students to determine why the bullying is happening and what can be done to make it stop. In his or her attempt to make peace among students and student groups, the close contact with all involved allows the guidance counselor to obtain a different level of knowledge and perception of the situation which teachers and even administrators are not often aware, bringing to light home circumstances and incidences of bullying which can add to what is going on within the school system. These professionals, who are on the forefront of the battle against bullying, bring a greater level of knowledge and a more complete view of the entire state of affairs of all involved, and often times are crucial in determining what is needed in making a bullying situation halt.

However, in considering actions which are taken to bring these acts of bullying to an end, counselors bring their own set of perceptions to the profession (Cunningham &

Whitten, 2007). Whether it is based on their own experiences with aggression, their experiences with students, or simply their own personalities, the way these situations are handled and perceived by these counselors can have a significant impact on the outcome of a bullying situation. Perceptions that these professionals hold regarding why a child demonstrates bully, victim, or bystander behaviors could affect the way an occurrence of bullying is handled. Although bullying has been researched and discussed in various forums (Tsitsika et al., 2014) the research, for the most part, was quantitative in nature (Patton, Hong, Patel, & Kral, 2015) and has managed to raise awareness and define roles. Only recently have in-depth connections regarding the core issue of bullying been determined as necessary in order to gain the deeper understanding of the participants (Patton et al., 2015), yet there are very few who actually examine the role of the guidance counselor in handling these situations and how they determine which interventions are most effective. More thorough links need to be made in order to begin to develop theories and generate relationships between the perceptions adults have regarding bullying and if these perceptions have an impact on their immediate interactions with involved parties. These deeper understandings regarding guidance counselor perceptions and actions have the potential to greatly impact education systems and anti-bullying programs worldwide, especially when the level of interaction and impact these professionals have within schools is considered.

Purpose Statement

Through qualitative means, the purpose of this study was to delve into the role of the school counselor in middle schools within Southwestern Pennsylvania in regards to bullying situations. By conducting one-on-one semi-structured interviews, the researcher

discussed the experiences middle school counselors have had with bullying situations, analyzed what interventions the counselors currently utilize with the students, families, community and school staff, examined how these counselors determine which of the employed interventions are more or less effective than others they have tried or seen implemented, and determined what parallelism existed among the counselors when defining factors used to measuring success. After analyzing the outcomes of the data sources for commonalities, as well as particular differences (i.e. level of experience, training, exposure to bullying situations, bullying program used), the researcher compiled a collection of best practices in bully intervention and prevention that emerged so that it can be used as a starting point for schools that are looking to reevaluate their existing methods or evaluate current methods used in schools in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

According to an article written in 2012, naming guidance counselors as “Unsung Heroes” in the battle against bullying, Jill Cook, Assistant Director of the American School Counselor Association (ACSA), stated that “during the past decade, school counselors have become much more active in educating students, faculty and staff about bullying and taking active steps to prevent it” (Finkel, 2012, p. 65). With the increases in educational accountability placed on administrators, special education needs placed on school psychologists, and the lack of funding for additional supports such as social workers, in-house therapists and mental health counselors, school counselors have been the ones to pick up the support needed for bullied students.

Although the school counselor is responsible for many tasks in the building, including scheduling, career and college planning, and parental support for academic concerns just to name a few, they also play a big part in building trusting relationships

with students who are struggling socially and emotionally with their peers. Often times, these students simply want to be able to talk to someone who truly “hears” their situation, will offer suggestions, or listen with a sympathetic ear when dealing with the emotional struggle that victims can face. Additionally, the school counselor can determine when the situation has risen from simple adolescent disagreement to something that requires administrative intervention or discipline according to school policy.

When looking at occurrences of school bullying situations, middle school aged students are reported to be most susceptible to these acts of aggression (Dranoff, 2006; S. Harris & Petrie, 2002; McManis, 2012). Middle schools across the nation and even the world are subject to bullying incidents. Students who are of middle school age (grades six, seven, and eight) are not only dealing with educational shifts from elementary school to middle school, which typically include increased responsibility and expectations, academically, emotionally, and behaviorally, but also emotional and physical changes that often lend themselves to students trying to determine their niche in the social structures. Students have reported that the most traumas resulting from bullying occurred during middle school, and the problem of bullying reaches a critical level of physical and mental harm during these painful adolescent years (Harris, 2002).

Consequently, other research states that there is a lack of exploration on the perceptions and understandings of adults involved in these children’s lives (Sawyer et al., 2011). Most of the research focuses on the children who are involved, including those who bully, are victimized, or who are bystanders (Sawyer et al., 2011). When referencing a dissertation study researching students in middle schools in western Pennsylvania and bully intervention techniques, the author made a poignant statement,

“One hundred percent of the students interviewed reported that if they were being bullied they would want it very badly to stop” (Crothers, Kolbert, & Barker, 2006, p. 477).

This study sought to add to the existing research and give educators, administrators, researchers, and other invested stakeholders an additional explanation to why a child might exhibit bully behaviors and how to help a victim or bystander through the lens of the guidance counselor. It further investigated the relationship between perceptions and actions of counselors who are seeing unfriendly incidents on a daily basis. These professionals are directly involved in handling these acts of aggression, and often times responsible for educating the school community on acts of bullying and how to handle them, communicating with parents and students, and determining when this aggression has reached a level of intensity that disciplinary measures need to be taken. This study also increased awareness of the bullying issue within schools. As stated in an article written regarding middle school bullying, “Awareness of the problem leads to a reduction in bullying, and a reduction in bullying leads to an improved middle school experience for everyone.” (S. Harris & Petrie, 2002, p. 51)

Research Questions

In its broadest sense, the purpose of this qualitative study was threefold: ascertain the role guidance counselors play in bullying situations, determine philosophy they employ when handling bullying situations, and based on the experience and training they have with bullying prevention and intervention, how middle school counselors deem a method as making a measurable positive impact on student behavior. This study will have implications for future research to determine what interventions are successfully implemented with students. Additionally, the data collected and analyzed from this

qualitative study can help novice and experienced counselors create a tool-kit of determined methods of success when dealing with bullying in middle schools.

The overall research questions follow:

1. What types of experiences have school counselors had with bullying behavior?
2. What philosophies of intervention have school counselors utilized with regards to the bully, victim, and bystander, and how do these counselors determine which approach is most appropriate?
3. What types of training have school counselors received with regards to bully prevention and intervention, and based on this training and level of experience, which philosophy or method of intervention do the counselors believe to be most successful and most frequently utilized?

Significance of the Study

Just about every adult can remember a time when they were the recipients of aggressive behavior. For many this was an isolated, yet memorable incident, but for others, the aggression lasted and made a permanent impact on their lives and who they are today. A longitudinal study of the effects of bullying into adulthood found that higher rates of stress, increased depression, and suicidal tendencies were more common in victims of bullying than those who reported no victimization (Costello, 2014).

Conversely, the bully does not seem to have a much better outlook for his or her future.

As stated in an article by Walter B. Roberts Jr. and Allan A. Morotti (2000) which looked at the bully as a potential victim in regards to his or her future opportunities,

“Aggressive 8 year-olds, by the time they reach age 30, were more likely than their nonaggressive peers to have been involved in criminal convictions, cited for moving

traffic violations, and have displayed more aggression toward both spouse and children. Their children were more likely to be severely physically punished. Additionally, the children of these childhood bullies often displayed the same type of aggressive behaviors as their parents did when they were that same age.” (p. 151)

These alarming facts were prominent throughout the literature for bullies, victims, and bystanders. However, the research still indicates an ongoing need to understand the roots of these problems and the methods that are valuable in seeing a decrease in their occurrence. Additionally, the research also lacks regarding the guidance counselor’s role in working within the school system in order to best help all involved. Understanding not only what the counselor does with regards to the immediate impact of bullying behavior, but also what longitudinal efforts for bullies, victims, and bystanders are deemed most effective can have future implications for school systems that are combating acts of aggression within their own walls. When examining the many roles a school counselor has with regards to students and their families, a strong argument can be made for the impact a deeper understanding of their decisions can have on the overall process of decreasing school bullying.

Interventions and Theoretical Position

When looking at theoretical methods utilized to handle bullying situations, although researchers cannot seem to come to an agreement on which is most effective, there are three which seem to be most widely discussed and implemented in schools. They are Social Learning Theory- Comprehensive (School, Family, and Community Approach), Common Group – Socio-Cultural Phenomenon, and Individual Interventions – Person-Centered Approach.

Social Learning Theory – Comprehensive (School, Family, and Community)

Approach

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, in its most basic form, explains human behaviors as part of a larger social picture. People behave the way they do because of either experiences they have or on the observations of experiences had by others (Bandura, 1971). In this theory, immediate, yet unrealized, reinforcement happens every time an incident occurs, albeit positive or negative. When applied to a bullying situation, if a child acts aggressively toward another child and the bystanders react in a way that is seen as positive by the bully, that behavior has been reinforced because it produced the wanted result, and therefore is typically repeated. Conversely, if the reaction is ignored or results in negative behavior, the reinforcement is still immediate, yet because it did not wield a positive reaction, the likelihood of the behavior being repeated lessens.

In utilizing this method for intervention purposes, education for the masses would occur with fidelity. Assemblies are performed for students, where motivational speakers encourage them as a group to react negatively toward aggression, defend the victims, and stand together for the common good. Professional development is provided for staff, giving them the tools to respond appropriately, and consistently, when bullying situations arise. These lessons are taken into the hallways, with posters throughout the building, serving as a constant reminder of how to behave properly, stating that bullying behavior is not appropriate, all in an attempt to constantly reinforce positive behaviors and ignore negative ones.

The most well known intervention that utilizes a social learning theory of implementation is the Olweus Bully Prevention Program. According to the program's homepage:

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is a comprehensive approach that includes school wide, classroom, individual, and community components. The program is focused on long-term change that creates a safe and positive school climate. It is designed and evaluated for use in elementary, middle, junior high, and high schools (K-12). The program's goals are to reduce and prevent bullying problems among school children and to improve peer relations at school. The program has been found to reduce bullying among students, improve the social climate of classrooms, and reduce related antisocial behaviors, such as vandalism and truancy. The Olweus Program has been implemented in more than a dozen countries around the world, and in thousands of schools in the United States (Olweus, 2015).

Olweus provides professional development to everyone involved with the student population. Students are consistently reminded of expectations of behavior, and bullying incidents are to be dealt with in a quick and consistent manner. Although Olweus has been the big name in bully prevention programs, other research-based programs are also available and implemented in schools throughout the nation, demonstrating that the theory of social learning is valuable and works within school settings.

Common Group – Socio-Cultural Phenomenon

Since the occurrence of bullying is not one with a specific approach to intervention, research-based theories tend to differ in their approach to mediation.

Because of this difference, other research suggests that groups of students with similarities (sex, gender, socio-economic status, etc.) tend to act similarly when placed into a larger group. Many of the statistics on bullying demonstrates this similarity through statistics and data collected regarding experiences with aggression. According to the data, boys tend to exhibit bullying behaviors using physical means of aggression, whereas girls use shaming, exclusion, and rumors when attempting to claim power over another individual. Boys are more likely to involve themselves in bullying than girls, yet it is the girls' behaviors that have the most long-lasting and deep emotional scars. Multiple sources have stated that middle school students tend to be the most susceptible to school bullying issues; however, bullying incidents have been documented at all ages (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008; Thornberg, 2011).

Small phenomenological groups are another means of intervention for those who are bullies, victims, or bystanders. An article completed in 2006 examined the success of a small group intervention program, Solving Problems Together, which focused primarily on victims of bullying, allowing them to work toward current and future solutions in a group setting (Hall, 2006). According to this study, the small group approach, when facilitated by a guidance counselor, "can help students develop the knowledge, attitude, and skills that will enable students to deal more effectively with bullying" (Hall, 2006, p. 213).

Small group theories have been implemented since the late 1800s (Tindale, 2002) when it was noticed that more than one person working toward a common goal was more effective than the person doing it alone. Commonalities were utilized in a positive manner, and appropriate behaviors and responses were collected and viewed together

which led to a stronger buy-in from the participants. When looking at this intervention technique from the lens of bullying intervention, it stands to reason that small groups of victims, bystanders, and bullies with additional commonalities such as age, gender, and social status would lend itself to producing more valuable responses. The facilitator would need to be aware of potential hazards of placing students with similar negative behaviors together as to not perpetuate the negativity but draw on the common positive behaviors in order to elicit the desired response.

Individual Interventions – A Person-Centered Approach

When looking at the phenomenon of bullying individually, personality factors make an impact. Attempts to stop bully behaviors could also be made on an individual basis. A person-centered approach looks to see if there is a specific correlation between certain traits and individuals or groups of individuals, and then intervenes regarding the similarities of these people. This type of intervention is more personal and can deal with specific occurrences of aggression, either working to help the bully understand what he or she did wrong or to give the victim the tools to handle a specific situation should it occur again. This method is another, more personal way, to intervene against participants in bullying situations.

Multiple studies completed within the past eight years demonstrated consistent results when discussing the relationship between individual personality and peer relations. A study found to support the theory of a connection between personality and bullying was completed in 2011 by Angela S. Book, Anthony A. Volk, and Ashley Hosker. The study explored the potential for a correlation between bullying and personality traits. In the discussion that followed the research, as predicted, there was a

significant relationship between bullying and personality as well as a connection between bullying and a positive measure of aggression. However, the researchers also stated that it was their belief that bullying is adaptive, meaning that “bullies can engage in targeted aggression while still maintaining the capacity for supportive friendships” (Book, Volk, & Hosker, 2012, p. 221). Their research was based on the foundation that although bullying and personality is correlational, it is also an adaptive behavior. The personality test used in this study was the HEXACO (Honesty- Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness) Personality Inventory-Revised test (HEXACO PI-R). The results of this study found significant relationships between bullying and the Honesty-Humility factor, as well as higher levels of aggression. The data collected in this study demonstrated there is a correlation between personality and bullying behavior.

Another study by R. Scholte, C.F. van Lieshout, C.A. de Wit, and M.A van Aken, examined adolescent personality types and subtypes and their psychosocial adjustment. The purpose of this investigation was to extend the research on personality types and subtypes and relationships among peers. In this study, adolescents were given a personality test and then asked to complete both a peer-reporting and self-reporting questionnaire regarding bullying involvement. The personality inventory that was used was the five-factor (Big Five) model. The results found three main personality types exhibited in adolescents: resilient, overcontrollers, and undercontrollers. Resilient were the most well adjusted students; they had the most parental and social support, had the highest self-esteem, and seemed to be unaffected by bullying or aggressive behaviors. Overcontrollers had the lowest self-esteem and were most often found to be the victims

of the bullying behaviors. Undercontrollers were perceived as exhibiting the highest amounts of aggression, struggled the most academically, and were the least attentive. Consequently, these students were reported to be the bullies.

By looking at the data collected and reported in both of these studies, which demonstrated a relationship between personality and bullying behavior and personality and peer relationships, it stands to reason that intervening with individuals based on their specific personality types would be impactful. This strategy would allow the counselor to reflect with the student on individual incidents and discuss how changes to his/her reactions would change the outcome of the event. This intervention would also lend itself to meeting with those who might not respond well to large and small group techniques, especially those who are looking to continue to gain attention and reinforcement through inappropriate behaviors.

Operational Definitions

The following terms were defined as used for the purpose of this study.

Middle school student – As used in this study, a student who is in grades six through eight.

School Counselor – As used in this study, a person who is employed in a middle school, which houses grades six, seven, and/or eight, under an educational specialist certification of school counselor and whose duties include working with students who are involved in bullying situations.

Bully – As used in this study, a person who uses aggressive behaviors in an attempt to threaten, intimidate or control another person.

Bullying behavior – As used in this study, behaviors demonstrated by bullies in an attempt to embarrass, harass, exploit, or seek control over another person.

Victim – As used in this study, a person who is the recipient of the aggression, and physical, mental, or emotional harm as demonstrated by the bully.

Bully-Victim – As used in this study, a person who is the recipient of the aggression and instead of reacting in a passive means, he or she reacts aggressively toward the bully.

Bystander – As used in this study, a person who witnesses bullying behavior and does nothing to intervene yet feels increased stress or remorse as a result of their behavior.

Limitations

There are several limitations that mitigated the impact of this study. In qualitative studies such as this one, the research was completed through only examining one group of people, namely middle school counselors. The overall population was limited to a particular geographical area and student population, which were middle schools in Southwestern Pennsylvania. This study also only considered data from middle school counselors who work with grades six, seven, or eight in suburban public schools. Since the study was qualitative, the information gathered depended on the participants' willingness to be open and honest with their responses, and took into account only their professional experiences that have occurred while working on the school campus, and the availability of any additional data willing to be shared.

Bullying participants tend to fall into three categories, bullies, victims, and bystanders. According to the research, each tended to exhibit certain personality commonalities that predispose them to behaviors of bullies, victims or bystanders. Those commonalities have made intervention programs, that are whole group focused,

prominent in schools such as Olweus, Bully Busters, and the like. Other intervention techniques deal with small groups who display similar behaviors in an attempt to share thoughts and feelings and also create a sense of belonging, especially for victims. One on one attempts are also made to help students understand how bullying behaviors impact others. School counselors are often the professionals who deal with these students and also intervene. They work with families, faculty, and administration closely to make schools a safe place for all students. This study sought to learn, from their point of view, what intervention and prevention techniques had the most impact on bullying behaviors in middle schools in Western Pennsylvania.

Summary

Aggressive behaviors are not a new phenomenon. However, the ramification of the aggression has manifested itself into dangerous and sometimes deadly actions. People who are the victims of bullying, even at a very young age, carry those thoughts and feelings of inadequacy with them, at times for their entire lives. School systems work daily to create places where students feel safe in order to focus on learning. Bullying behavior is not only a distraction for those who are the recipients of this behavior, but also for those who are forced to witness it, who often times feeling helpless and unable to defend the victim. Taking the time to research what is being done at the middle school level, where bullying is most prevalent, and by school counselors, who often times are the ones given the task, will allow others to determine best practices and philosophies that work, therefore enriching the lives of students and making schools a source of comfort and not anguish.

Chapter One discussed the purpose and importance of this study, the research design, and the limitations of the study. Chapter Two, the review of the literature, will investigate the prevalence of bullying at the middle school level, theories that give support to why students exhibit bullying behaviors and what support methods are available for victims, bystanders and bullies.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Formal exploration of bullying behaviors started to appear in educational literature in the early 1980s when Dan Olweus, a Norwegian researcher, began to study this topic. School officials did not take this aggressive conduct seriously, attributing it to typical adolescent behavior, until three boys in Scandinavia committed suicide after reportedly being bullied by peers (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). Since then, an abundance of research has been completed and many articles and books have been written on the topic of bullying. This study will add to the existing research that seeks to determine the perceptions school counselors have as to what methods are most effective in handling bullying situations. The research seeks to clarify if counselors perceive one strategy as more effective over another and will explore what counseling methods are employed within their schools. This chapter is developed into nine sections relative to the concepts most associated with bullying behaviors and the perceptions middle school counselors have as to what approaches are most effective for the bully, victim, and bystander.

Increase in School Violence

As a nation, we are faced with increased violence among our youth. School systems and teachers used to be charged with the job of deterring smoking in the bathrooms, talking during class, and chewing gum. The term “reactive aggression” was created during the 1930s and defined as a behavior which was exhibited as a reaction to frustration (Baran, 2006). Today, student offenses have grown into more violent acts that include bullying behaviors such as slapping and hitting, spreading rumors, and isolating victims. It was during the 1970s that bullying became a researchable term that was

applied to negative behaviors against a child who cannot defend him or herself (Olweus, 2003). However, actions exhibited by today's students as a potential result of bullying have escalated to include gang violence, assault, and even death for those students who have become victims of the most extreme forms of school violence.

Effects of Bullying

This aggressive behavior is steadily gaining attention because of the potential ramifications for everyone involved. As seen in multiple school shooting tragedies, innocent bystanders can fall victim to acts of aggression executed by a victim of bullying. According to a fact sheet published in 2012 by the National Center for Violence Prevention, "there were about 828,000 nonfatal victimizations at school among students 12 to 18 years of age in 2010" (Center for Safe Schools). Also discussed in the same report, a 2011 national sample of students in grades nine-twelve reported that almost 6% did not go to school one or more days because they did not feel safe at school or on their way to or from school. Not only is student attendance a mandatory component of public education, but also the time lost from student absenteeism is almost impossible to compensate for academically (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). These victims begin to falter not only socially, but also academically as a result of an unsafe feeling regarding school.

Another national report published by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in 2012 stated that

in a nationally representative sample of youth in grades 9-12: 20.1% reported being bullied on school property in the 12 months preceding the survey; and the prevalence was higher among females (22%) than males (18.2%), 16.2% reported being bullied electronically (email, chat room, website, texting) in the 12 months

preceding the survey; the prevalence was higher among females (22,1%) than males (10.8%) (Center for Disease Control, 2012, p.1).

This regularity of individual bullying accounts reported by nearly a quarter of students across the nation does not include the possible number of students who were too embarrassed or humiliated to admit to such treatment.

Global Presence of Bullying

In a 2007 study completed by Gregory Green, ancient Greece, England, and Australia have all reported problems relating to bullying for centuries, demonstrating that the issue of bullying behavior is not only prevalent across countries and continents, but also one which has demonstrated prolonged existence. Moreover, the attempt to continually validate this behavior being harmful is widespread, as bullying has been studied at kindergarten, workplaces, prisons, and also in an armed forces setting (Salmivalli, 2010). Nearly every adult is able to recall a time when they witnessed a situation of a person being bullied, were a victim of bullies themselves, or were the bully in a given situation. Some see these experiences as a rite of passage, having experienced various forms of teasing and bullying themselves, without much intervention from adults. However, the poor psychosocial adjustment and potential for long term consequences as discussed in Alisha Pollastri's longitudinal study of self-esteem in bullies and bully/victims (2010), along with the increase in school violence overall and proven maladjustment of those who were victim to bullying behavior, deems this matter to be more important than once assumed.

Theories of Bullying

When looking for a cause for bullying, the only consistent findings are that there is no consistent theory for bullying all stakeholders can agree upon. Some researchers demonstrate that aggression is intrinsic and part of a person's personality, as is a lack of assertiveness in victims and bystanders. Others have completed studies in which the data show the connection between social and home experiences and bullying, victim, or bystander behavior; therefore, there is not a particular one-size-fits-all approach to bully intervention. Although the research is extensive on bully prevention programs, the data needs to be examined to determine the approaches that are best in different situations.

A Discussion Regarding Theory

In 2008, Roz Dixon completed interviews with eleven psychologists who were noted experts in bullying behaviors. Her qualitative findings, although showing streams of consistency, simply added to the findings that one theory of the causes of certain behaviors does not exist. The unpredictability of human nature and variables surrounding bullying make it hard to define specific reasons for why it happens. Moreover, personality, family structures, group dynamics, school, culture and community structures are all a part of what makes a person act and react in certain situations. Even philosophies that address certain parts of a person's "make-up" can be viewed through various components of different theories.

All eleven agreed, however, that the research on this subject has done a great job in raising awareness regarding bullying, clarifying parameters, and identifying key factors involved in all aspects of the bullying dynamic. They suggest that there is a need for stronger explanatory theories which would help to improve intervention and to also

create stronger links between the findings (Dixon, 2008). The data collected now are largely based on demographics such as how much, when, where, and why. This information can only go so far in the creation of a theory for bullying; therefore data collected and analyzed on a deeper level would be more meaningful.

Dixon further states that since professional journals do not publish certain types of studies, they are not completed. “Academic psychology tolerates a wide range of approaches but rewards only a few” (p. 113) is a statement which she uses to summarize her study and further point out the inequalities which might contribute to the lack of expert understanding in the area of bullying and aggression.

Additionally, the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention documented risk factors for students who may be more prone to aggression. These include, but are not limited to “Prior history of violence, drug, alcohol, or tobacco use, association with delinquent peers, poor family functioning, poor grades in school, and poverty in the community” (Prevention, 2012). Further studies have given additional information regarding those who may be prone to bullying behaviors, such as “being male, having a tendency to displace shame, and being exposed to parental stigmatization” (Pontzer, 2009).

Although psychologists do not seem to have the data necessary to draw one conclusion on why bullying happens, and truly cannot identify more than risk factors for potential aggressive behaviors or victim behaviors, researchers continue to investigate and collect information to strengthen certain theories and disprove others. The question of whether bullying behaviors are developmental or adaptive in nature still exists within these educational discussions. Looking at theories of behavior, in addition to those risk

factors, such as Social Learning, can assist in understanding why bullying happens, and then, based on that theory, provide a logical means of intervention to solve the problem.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Behaviorism was the main explanation for the way a person acted from the 1920s to 1950 and is still seen as a valuable resource among those looking for an explanation for behaviors today. This model theorizes that a person's behavior is a result of their environment, a reaction to a stimulus (Saul A. McLeod, 2007). Behaviorism focuses on observable behaviors, what can be seen, as opposed to what someone is thinking. This theory would encompass the idea that bullying behaviors are learned from home environment, what a child might see on television, or what is considered acceptable by those with whom he or she spends his or her time.

Albert Bandura's social learning theory took this theory and demonstrated that behavior is learned from the environment through his famous bobo doll experiment (Saul A. McLeod, 2011). He suggests that children are likely to act like people he or she perceives as similar to him or herself, and additionally more likely to model behavior from those of the same sex. Modeled behaviors can then be strengthened by positive reinforcement. Behaviors can also be reinforced negatively, most likely through some type of punishment, and the behavior would then tend to decrease. Additionally, children can also witness what happens to others when they behave a certain way and choose their behaviors as a result of the reinforcement someone else receives (vicarious reinforcement) Positive reinforcement is the desired result, and the child will begin to model his or her actions in order to receive this praise (Bandura, 1971).

This idea would explain why students who are bullies are also able to have positive relationships with peers and teachers. The Social Learning Theory also explains how bullies are able to adapt their behaviors to what is appropriate in a given social situation. This theory demonstrates the idea that bullying behaviors, or even passive behaviors, are adaptive in nature and learned through what the child has witnessed throughout his or her life or what he or she feels will result in a positive reaction from those who are important in his or her life. Those who perceive bullying behaviors as a result of the experiences a person has lived through combined with their environments is an example of the social learning theory of why bullying arises. This is only one theory of why bullying occurs, and is not perceived as the only theory. Others believe that the impact from early learning experiences in the home cause a person to be maladjusted and therefore behave inappropriately toward his or her peers.

Regenerative Shaming Theory and Bullying in Schools

In an article that examines the connection between shame and guilt and aggressive behavior, Braithwaite's Regenerative Shaming Theory is discussed as an early learning of what is right and wrong as seen through parent's approval or disapproval of certain behaviors (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008). Through this behavior, children learn at an early age what is deemed to be appropriate and inappropriate and mostly the parents, or those involved in a child's upbringing during the formative years, do this reinforcement. Bonding with the mother and shaming management had a direct impact on the child's aggressive behaviors with peers and siblings. Paternal bonding did not seem to have any effect on the behavior. Children who were taught appropriate means of shaming scored

low on bullying, whereas children who were maladjusted and taught shame and disapproval in a negative way scored high on bullying and aggression.

A Profile of the Bully

Bullying is defined by one researcher as “repeated acts of unprovoked aggression that are damaging psychologically or physically for the victim, where the strength of the aggressor and victim is unequal” (Jankauskiene, Kardelis, Sukys, & Kardeliene, 2008, p. 146). In addition, three commonly accepted components supplement the definition of bullying behavior: intention to harm, repetitive in nature, and an imbalance of power (Cho, Hendrickson, & Mock, 2009). Some might mistake bullying for teasing, but in looking to determine the difference, one must consider the nature of the behavior, the level of intensity, the rate the behavior occurs, as well as the target’s response to the behavior (Roberts Jr. & Morotti, 2000). Therefore, what is considered teasing for one student might be deemed bullying for another. As a result, there is a need for increased education for parents, educators, and students on the definition of bullying and how to identify the behaviors. The lack of current education could explain the outcome and the inconsistent nature of these behaviors and also the struggles in properly handling them.

There are various types of and labels for bullying, with the most encompassing being direct and indirect bullying. Direct bullying can be physical in nature. It can also be verbal such as name-calling. Sexual harassment is also included in this type of direct bullying (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). Indirect bullying is typically characterized by isolating students, ignoring students, and spreading rumors about a victim (Thornberg, 2011). There are many social factors which can lead to bullying such as group

membership, peer pressure, and personal factors such as physical strength, aggressiveness, and a lack of empathy (van Goethem, Scholte, & Wiers, 2010).

Robert Thornberg (2011) reported that typically a conflicted culture in a school, as well as increased importance placed on status and popularity, could increase the bullying dynamic. Students want to gain status among their peers and bullying is deemed an appropriate method in which this status can be gained. Additionally an emphasis on sports can increase the likelihood of bullying to occur. Students who are taught to be competitive through sports without a balance placed on the importance of teamwork could displace that competitiveness through aggression, especially with smaller or less athletic peers (Thornberg, 2011).

Individual factors also play a part in which role an adolescent will play in bullying behaviors. Empathy, or a lack thereof, perceived social success, level of aggression, ability to regulate emotion, and temperamental disposition, can all be a determinant of bullying behavior (Gagnon, 2012; Scholte, van Lieshout, de Wit, & van Aken, 2005). Additional traits for bullies include little anxiety and insecurity, a desire to be in control, lack of remorse and empathy for victims, and aggressive behaviors demonstrated at home (Carter, 2011; Scholte et al., 2005). Research supports the idea that most bullies have never been victims and therefore cannot see themselves as victims or empathize with how a victim might feel (Gagnon, 2012). Bullies additionally are reported to have poor relationships with authority figures such as parents and teachers; however, they seem to have an above average group of friends and those peer interactions are important to them (Meland, Rydning, Lobben, Bredablik, & Ekeland, 2010). They are typically loud and

assertive, hostile and aggressive, and self-confident members of the “popular” groups in schools (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008).

Gender Difference in Bullying

In a study which looked at gender differences with regards to bullying, boys reported choosing students to bully who did not fit in, were physically weaker, or wore different types of clothes (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). Girls’ reasons for bullying were similar in that the other girls did not fit in; however, the girls also listed facial appearance, clothing, and weight as reasons to bully someone. Other tendencies for students at risk of being bullies are socio-economic status and the family unit as a whole, meaning that students of intact families were more likely to not bully ((Jansen, Veenstra, Ormel, Verhulst, & Reijneveld, 2011). Also these students at risk for displaying bullying behaviors are typically insensitive to punishment, making it difficult to change their actions even with the addition of “zero tolerance” bullying policies school districts currently have in place.

D. Johnson and G. Lewis completed a study in 1999, asking 245 fourteen and fifteen year olds to self-report using a checklist to determine the self-perceptions of adolescent bullies. This study looked at both the social and scholastic concepts. The results of his study showed that the typical bully has a relatively positive self-concept and self-esteem. Physical bullying was shown to be more likely done by boys rather than girls and overall bullying was three times more likely to be done by boys than girls. Additionally, although it was not statistically significant, bullies were rated lower academically than their non-bullying peers (Johnson & Lewis, 1999). Johnson discussed,

as a result of his study, that the bullies might be unaware of what their behaviors do to people, and they see themselves as likeable.

Additional Participants in the Bullying Spectrum

There are more types of participants in the bully dynamic than just the bully. Dan Olweus (2003) describes four types of participants in the bullying spectrum. The bully is the person who begins the aggressive behavior. The followers are active participants but do not start the behavior. The supporters support the behavior but do not take an active role. The passive supporters like the behavior but do not openly support it (Olweus, 2003). In a dissertation completed by Ann Crapanzano in 2010, she wanted to understand the participant roles of the bully. This longitudinal quantitative study collected data at two points in time over two school years. It was determined that there were four bully participant roles (the bully, participant, observer, and defender) but the three aside from the defender were closely correlated. All three demonstrated callous unemotional traits, aggressive behaviors, and conduct problems. These behaviors were found more often in boys than girls (Crapanzano, 2010).

Consequences for the Bully

Long-term outcomes for those who bully are not positive. Bullies are up to six times more likely to be suspended and three times more likely to receive detention while in school due to behavioral adjustment issues (Carter, 2011). Longitudinal studies show that bullies have a four times more likely occurrence of relatively serious criminal behaviors, with 40% of bullies having three or more criminal convictions by the age of 24 (Carter, 2011; S. Harris & Petrie, 2002). Those who were bullies throughout childhood were reported to bully at the university level as well (Pontzer, 2009). It has also been

reported that bullies are more likely to drop out of school (S. Harris & Petrie, 2002). Jeong-il Cho (2009) adds that other long-term effects on bullies include the aforementioned criminality, and also delinquency, social phobia and spousal abuse. Yet another report states that if a bully shows signs of aggression by the time they are eight years old, at the age of thirty they will have been involved in criminal convictions, traffic violations, and aggressive acts toward their spouse and peers (Olweus, 2003). Overall, the outlook for a bully is not positive.

Effectiveness of Interventions

Interventions for bullies are far and few between. Walter Roberts (2000) states in his article “victim interventions can fail without understanding why the bully was motivated to bully”. He goes on to discuss the lack of research that exists in providing services for the bullies, as most are targeted for the victim or the bystander. Susan Carter (2001, p. 97) corroborates this statement by affirming “programs do little to take away power and opportunities for the bully.” She continues to state that bullying will not stop unless the reasons for the bullying are addressed, the conditions in which they occur examined, and the programs developed for the bullies is intensified. As a final recourse for the bully, after other methods of intervention have failed, Carter suggests that a long-term plan might be an evaluation for emotional support services and a behavior analysis and plan might need to be put into place for long-term success and monitoring. On the opposing side of the bullying triad is the victim, and the qualities displayed by the person who is the recipient of the bullying behavior needs to be examined in order to have a more complete picture of the actions and reactions to aggressive conduct.

A Profile of the Victim

The recipient of aggressive adolescent behaviors is referred to as the victim. Since the victims are often described as maladjusted and inattentive with low self-esteem (Cho et al., 2009; Pollastri, Cardemil, & O'Donnell, 2010), trying to not only understand the impact of bullying on their development but also how to help them become more resilient to aggression, has been a source of research for over thirty years. Countless articles, books, and websites exist for the purpose of teaching tolerance and building self-esteem in victims.

Much of the bullying behaviors are covert and hard to detect, being done in hidden areas around the school (Lewis-Jordan, 2012). Additionally, bullying is also reported to occur on the way to and from school, at lunch, during extracurricular activities, in the classrooms, and in the hallways (Long & Alexander, 2010). Due to the many locations, it is easy to see why children who are victims would find it nearly impossible to get away from potential bullying situations. This variance in location can be part of the reason bullying is related to victims fear of going to school, truancy issues, trouble with concentration while in school, overall unhappiness, low self-esteem, peer rejection, anxiety, depression, and physical ailments such as headaches, all of which exist for those who are the target of a bully (Cho et al., 2009).

Characteristics of the Victim

Stelios Georgiou and Panayiotis Stavrinos quantitatively profiled bullies, victims, and bully-victims in a 2008 study of 337 Greek Cypriot early adolescents with a mean age of 11.6. Descriptors of students who were labeled as targets for bullies were stated to be vulnerable, submissive, and different. They also exhibited social

maladjustment, loneliness, and had poor relationships with their peers (Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2008). According to the data collected, these students were also at-risk for depression or anxiety, lower self-esteem, and were viewed in some way to have a different physical appearance than their peers (Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2008; Harper, 2011; Jankauskiene et al., 2008).

Corroborating these traits, in 2011, Michelle Harris completed a study of personality and self-compassion of former victims of bullying. She describes the victim as more anxious and insecure in general, as well as cautious, sensitive, and quiet. Victims typically are slated as small, weak, underachieving adolescents who are less popular than their peers. Multiple articles support the description of victims as being less popular and less accepted by their peers (Biggs et al., 2010; de Bruyn, Cillessen, & Wissink, 2010). Additionally, those students with a lower socio-economic status or who are from a single-parent household are more likely to be victimized (Jankauskiene et al., 2008). Obese students are also two times more likely to be victims than those students of lower weight (Jankauskiene et al., 2008), and disability status also puts students at risk for bullying (Cho et al., 2009).

Xin Ma studied characteristics of victims in correlation to bullies in 2001. He found that students with high anxiety, poor social skills, and low self esteem are more likely to be bullied than to bully others, and although physical attributes such as glasses, being overweight, or a different hair color might be the topic of a bully's insults, it is not the original factor which made the victim a target. Also, students who are younger or physically smaller were more likely to be victimized. Age does seem to make a difference in bullying, as physical condition seems to become less of a reason for being

bullied as the adolescent grows older. Additionally, another characteristic of victims is demographic, namely school size. Victims in small schools have more of a tendency to become repeated victims because there is less opportunity for bullies to locate new victims in a small school (Ma, 2001). This stigmatizing of victims happens during the bullying period, but is maintained and enhanced long after the aggressive behaviors cease.

Consequences for the Victim

Victims of bullying behaviors are prone to mental, physical, and emotional consequences due to the aggression of bullies. Robert Thornberg discusses the four phases a victim experiences in his 2011 review of the qualitative research on bullying. The victimization begins with the initial attacks, albeit direct or indirect bullying. Next is the double victimizing, both internal and external, which happens when the victim is now seen by his or her peers as lower on the social ladder or is less accepted. Perhaps the victim is even losing friends and begins to internalize those feelings of inadequacy, considering them as the truth. The victims either exhibit behavioral self-blame (“I did something wrong”) or attribute the self-blame as part of his or her character (“I am something wrong”) (Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2008). This increased self-blame increases the likelihood of victimization (Harper, 2011). The third phase is when the bullying stops, but this is not the end of the victim experience. The final phase is the after-effects of the bullying, which can be seen over several years even when the bullying behavior stops (Thornberg, 2011). These students are often labeled the “loners” and “nerds” due to the stigmatization associated with being a victim of bullying (Thornberg, 2011, p. 261).

A quantitative study completed in 2010 looked to determine the lasting effect bullying has on a victim's adjustment supported the characteristics of the victim's sometimes-bleak trajectory for success (Biggs, Vernberg, Little, Dill, Fonagy, & Twemlow). They found that "children's reputations as victims are stable and become increasingly solidified over time" (Biggs et al., 2010, p. 142). Researchers supported the fact that bullying tends to increase as an adolescent exits elementary school and enters a secondary school placement (Biggs et al., 2010). Their data paints a dim picture for the victim, especially one who is repeatedly victimized over multiple years. Their prediction of victimization causing greater distress held true. Albeit disheartening, victims in this study were shown to display increased negative emotions such as anger, sadness and anxiety, and conversely, their positive emotions such as happiness, joy, and excitement were dulled (Biggs et al., 2010).

Although girls are shown to be more resilient than boys, being bullied is associated with emotional and behavioral problems over time, excluding any pre-existing conditions; however, a lower intelligence quotient or lower socio-economic status showed a less likely ability to be resilient (Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt, & Arseneault, 2010). Research showed that victims exhibited high levels of depression and poorer self-esteem even at age 23, long after the bullying stopped (S. Harris & Petrie, 2002; Sigurdson, Undheim, Wallander, Lydersen, & Sund, 2015). These adults were also at an increased risk for schizophrenia and suicide as well as other mental health issues which made it more difficult for them to become independent adults living on their own (& Petrie, 2002; Sigurdson et al., 2015). Additionally, victims needed to increase their skills in recognizing bully behaviors, because as adults, bullies became more aware of the

need to hide their aggression. When left untreated, these behaviors did not go away in adulthood. The bullies changed their method of delivery, and the victims remain the recipient of these behaviors, well into adulthood and in the workplace (Ciby & Raya, 2014; Costello, 2014; Green, 2007).

Advocacy for the Victim

The research for victims often speaks of isolation and introversion, with the only outlook for these recipients of aggression as acts of violence. Victims seek assistance and want the behaviors to stop. In a study completed in Australia in 2013, Mitchell Dowling and Timothy Carey wanted to determine when victims of bullying sought out help and from who help was pursued. Using a self-reporting questionnaire, data were gathered from students in years 5 and 6 regarding seeking out help as a result of being bullied. Students saw teachers as wanting to stop bullying, but that did not increase the students' willingness to come to them for help. Groups of students who collectively saw themselves as victims of bullying found it easier to informally talk to those students who saw themselves in the same light. This study also suggested that personal outcomes for victims vary and must be included in the method of intervention for increased effectiveness of the program (Dowling & Carey, 2013). The researchers went on to suggest that intervention programs which promote not only seeking what the victim wants as a resolution, but also increased communication between the home and school as being the most successful.

Beth Uale (2010) analyzed the role of teachers as possible bystanders in the bullying system. Teachers are viewed as the people who spend the most time with students, aside from their parents, and therefore a natural advocate for victims. In this

study, the discrepancy among adults who witness bullying behaviors was apparent. First, not all adults could agree on what should be reported. Physical and emotional behaviors were seen as more reportable than social behaviors. This factor could lend itself to understanding why relational aggression is so difficult to understand, mostly because it might, in fact, be underreported (Taylor, 2007). Women were found to report more often than men, and the type of bullying was seen as more or less severe depending on the gender. Men determined physical aggression as more reportable whereas women viewed social and emotional acts as equally reportable as physical (Uale, 2010). These traits could be related to what teachers have experienced, as relational aggression is more apparent in females than males (McEachern & Snyder, 2012; nee Redden, 2013).

Another study found similar responses when examining teacher perceptions of the three types of bullying: physical, verbal, and social exclusion (Kinan, 2010). In collecting responses from 138 participants, the results were similar. Physical bullying was seen as more problematic. Teachers were more likely to intervene in these situations whereas in emotional and social bullying situations, they were less likely to feel empathy toward the victim and as a result, less likely to intervene or report. Through the outcomes of these studies, one can understand why the intervention methods for victims are not as consistent as one would hope them to be. That inconsistency has had yet another component added to the variants in these situations, which has caused advocacy for victims to become more difficult recently. The added variant is the discovery of another type of victim, the bully/victim.

A Profile of the Bully/Victim

McManis (2012) describes two types of victims in the bully and victim dynamic. One is a passive victim who does not fight back and receives the abuse dealt out by the bully. However, another type of victim is beginning to draw more attention and create yet another area for research. This victim is a proactive victim who provokes the bully and attempts to fight back when attacked either verbally or physically. This behavior has also been labeled as reactive bullying which is described as when a victim becomes a bully (McManis, 2012). This type of person is now more commonly known as the bully-victim. The bully-victim is also described as highly inattentive and hyperactive (Cho et al., 2009). These students are typically lonely and disliked by their peers; therefore, they do not have the supporters the true victim has because of their ability to fight back. They display characteristics of both the bully and the victim, and tend to displace the blame away from themselves even when they have done something wrong. These students also are more depressed and show more physical symptoms of anxiety than their peers (Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2008). Like their bully counterpart, they are also reported to be low achieving academically.

Characteristics of the Bully/Victim

A longitudinal study completed through the Tracking Adolescents' Individual Lives' Survey (TRAILS) looked into preschool developmental characteristics and how they related to being a bully, victim, or bully-victim in late elementary and early secondary school (Jansen et al., 2011). This study was initiated in 2001 with data collected from parents regarding preschool characteristics and published in 2011, regarding those same children at the age of 11 and 13.5. Results found that youngsters

with preschool anxiety were less likely to be bully-victims. Children who were aggressive in preschool were more likely to be bully-victims in adolescence, demonstrating that these behaviors are shown in early actions. Additionally, socio-economic status and gender were factors, with boys from lower income families being more at-risk for developing these behaviors later in adolescence. Parental mental health was also examined, but a correlation between parental mental health and bully-victim conduct was not found.

Alisha Pollastri (2010) completed a longitudinal study reviewing differences in self-esteem in pure bullies and bully victims. Data were collected from 307 middle school students from four schools in two cities in the Northeast United States over a period of a year and a half. Students completed a self-report questionnaire at four different points over the data collection period. Cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses showed that the self-esteem in bully-victims was significantly lower than that of pure bullies (Pollastri et al., 2010). Over time, girls in the bully and bully-victim category reported an increase in self-esteem whereas the boys showed no change. This difference in self-esteem levels among bullies and bully-victims further demonstrates the need to view these two groups as two separate entities.

Another study looked deeper into the characterization of bully-victim and defined these students as those who bully others and are bullied themselves (Felipe, de Ossomo García, Babarro, & Arias, 2011). These students annoy and bother other students in order to create tension in an attempt to fight back. They are seemingly the most disliked by their peers. Felipe (2011) also supports the other research by stating that these students are aggressive and anxious, have a high level of depression, and low level of self-esteem.

Advocacy for the Bully-Victim

Understanding the reasoning for the bully-victim to act out in an aggressive manner is imperative for helping to intervene on behalf of that person. Typically, the response to a bully is swift and reactive to the situation. School officials must look into the motive for why the action took place, because that is what usually determines if the bully is truly a bully-victim (Roberts & Morotti, 2000). Once that is determined, the approach for learning and reflection can begin to take place.

To further explain this bully-victim dynamic, and help others understand why the bully-victim needs the time to explain his or her behaviors, a comparison study was completed examining the difference between the bully and bully-victim (Sharkey et al., 2014). The primary difference was in the perceived power disadvantage. In this quantitative study, students who were reported as exhibiting bullying behaviors without a power disadvantage, and also were victims of aggressive actions were more associated with the bully-victim label. This could be explained as the child who trips and falls into a group of students in the hallway, while engaging in horseplay or simply losing balance, but this is interpreted by his or her peers as an act of aggression, or the child who throws a ball and hits someone because of poor aim and not because it was intentional. It was found in this study that these children “struggled more with emotional distress and withdrawal which is consistent with studies that have found associations between victimization and depression, loneliness, self-esteem, and anxiety” (p. 91).

Although bully-victim is a relatively new term in the educational research concerning bullying, it is becoming one that is seen individually from the victim and bully. The bully-victim has his or her own unique characteristics and behaviors and

needs to be viewed as an independent entity when intervention techniques are created and implemented. The final, and perhaps, most influential person in regards to bullying situation, is the bystander.

A Profile of the Bystander

Bystanders of bullying can possibly be the most powerful person within this cycle, yet often times they are unaware of the influence they yield. This influence can be one of two extremes, reinforcing the bully or defending the victim. Olweus (2003) includes disengaged onlookers, possible defenders and defenders in the entire grouping of bystander, suggesting how their actions can take on various shades of either support or defense.

The disengaged onlooker watches the bullying occur but does nothing to intervene or stop the aggressive behavior from happening. This action can be seen as a sign of acceptance by the bully and the victim (Olweus, 2003). The possible defender might intervene if the actions become severe enough but do not do so on a regular basis. Defenders of the bully are the adolescents who jump in and take action against the bully immediately upon witnessing any type of aggressive behaviors.

Impact of the Bystander on Bullying Behaviors

In the 2011 quantitative study completed by Christina Salmivalli, Marinus Voeten, and Elisa Poskiparta, 6,764 students in grades three through five were given internet questionnaires to complete regarding whether bystanders' behaviors (reinforcing the bully or standing up for the victim) made a difference in the amount of bullying behaviors seen in the classroom. This study was the first one to show levels of defending and reinforcing are directly related to the frequency of bullying (Crapanzano, 2010;

Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011). Their research showed that bystanders affect bullying positively when they defend the victim and negatively when they reinforce the bully. They further reported that when bystanders reacted in a way that defended the victim, the bullying situation typically disseminated and even ceased altogether.

Additionally, bystanders were able to help the victims through their show of support, even assisting in gains in self-esteem, less anxiousness, and depression.

Conversely, when students did nothing to defend the target of the bullying behavior, there was something stopping them from intervening even when they knew it was wrong. Sandra Harris (2002) suggests, “Bystanders rarely get involved for fear of being the next victim or doing the wrong thing” (p. 45). Harris discusses what adolescents see as possible outcomes to defending a victim. Losing his or her own social status by defending someone who is seen as less than desirable socially, is seen as a potential reason to stay neutral. Loss of confidence and self-respect are other potential negatives to defending the victim, especially if the bully then turns his or her aggression on the defender. Bystanders tend to state that they thought the bully “was only joking” in a potential method of defending their bullying.

In the incident where Alex Hribal was accused of stabbing and slashing multiple students during a rampage in Franklin Regional High School in 2014, Dr. Bruce Chambers discussed the pressure and mental agony of being a bystander. During his testimony, given after he had met with the accused student three times, Dr. Chambers stated that Hribal “was reacting to the general idea of bullying, actually observing people being bullied. This idea that people were hypocrites certainly affected his sense of his own social isolation. He identified with the Columbine perpetrators in that regard”

(Hardway, 2014). If this act of violence was, in fact, initiated as a result of witnessing repeated bullying behaviors, then the bystander stands just as much to lose as the victim.

There is also evidence that some students become desensitized by bullying the more they witness the behavior and, therefore, they become less and less sympathetic to the victims (S. Harris & Petrie, 2002; Rowe, Theriot, Sowers, & Dulmus, 2004). Rowe (2004) states that this desensitization could possibly lead to lower empathy later in life. Researchers have also suggested that if there is no motivation for defending the victim, the adolescent is not as inclined to do so. Furthermore, personal values along with anticipated outcomes are what make the child determine if the aggressive behavior he or she is witnessing is important enough of an action to defend (Pöyhönen, Jaana, & Salmivalli 2012; Salmivalli et al., 2011).

Impact on the Bystander as a Witness to Bullying Behaviors

Bystanders typically have three reactions after witnessing an act of bullying: ignoring the behavior, defending the victim, or reinforcing the bully. Ignoring can often times be seen as an act of reinforcement on the bully's part, but typically it is done because the bystander fears repercussion or simply does not possess the personal strength to intervene (Obermann, 2011; Salmivalli et al., 2011).

Matthew Hutchinson (2012) explored the impact of bullying on bystanders. His qualitative study explored the common themes that exist when bystanders choose to react to acts of bullying. In his study, students of the ages 12 and 13 were interviewed through an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in an attempt to understand what they witnessed and why they chose the method of intervention or non-intervention as a result (Hutchinson, 2012). He labeled bystanders as “assistants” who supported the aggressor,

“reinforcers” who laughed or watched the bully’s actions, “outsiders” who ignored events but are knowledgeable of them, and “defenders” who stood up for the victim (p. 426).

The eight students from the United Kingdom who volunteered were interviewed and their statements were collected into themes.

These bystanders spoke more often of the verbal and emotional bullying than the more commonly visualized physical bullying. They talked of not speaking out due to fear of repercussion and fear of their own social status changing. Those who did defend the victims felt a strong emotional and moral responsibility to the victim. The social circle which is important to middle school aged students was also discussed, as multiple students interviewed felt that losing their own friends as a result of interference was more important than the shame they felt for not intervening.

These bystanders felt their own emotional distress as a result of not defending these situations, such as shame, anger, sadness, disappointment, and confusion (p. 436). These emotions point out the fact that bystanders are not alone in the hurt caused by bullying actions. In fact these actions also affect them, just in a different way.

Middle School Bullying Prevalence

Adolescents in grades six through eight are often at the greatest risk for anti-social behaviors such as bullying. Bullying has been shown to impact up to 70% of students at one time or another and can cause lifelong damage to students, along with creating a negative school environment (Lee A. Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). According to Gregory Green (2007), middle school appears to be the centralized location where bullying occurs. Additionally, the results of a longitudinal study completed in 2012 showed that bullying behaviors increased during the transition from elementary to middle school and decreased

again at the end of middle school (McManis, 2012). McManis (2012) also stated that bullying is most likely to happen in middle school due to all of the changes and differences happening among the students, physically and emotionally. These typical variances in middle school aged students make students easy targets for bullying behavior and are most likely physical differences that cannot be helped, such as height. The reasoning behind the perceived decrease in bullying at the end of middle school was that the adolescents begin to learn that this behavior is not socially acceptable; they also gain more self-confidence and security in their place among their peers (McManis, 2012).

In a study completed in 2004 regarding the perceptions of bullying and non-bullying children in a rural United States setting, grades three through eight were surveyed. Substantiating the data that middle school is the primary place for bullying to occur, there was a larger percentage of bullying reported by the students in grades seven and eight (Rowe et al., 2004). Even if the issue of bullying were to be eliminated, middle school students are at the greatest risk for many other extrinsic and intrinsic concerns such as learning to control their emotions, identify their social status, and create positive academic patterns to sustain them through secondary school (S. Harris & Petrie, 2002). Compounding this time of increased risk for students with bullying can lead to potential self-harming and destructive behaviors. Students have reported multiple times that bullying caused the most traumas during the formative middle school years (S. Harris & Petrie, 2002). Additionally, a dissertation study completed by Janet Walsh, which evaluated existing data from a four year program implementation based on a school-wide effort to heighten awareness of bullying and victimization, reported that bullying peaks at the middle school level (Walsh, 2005).

Now that the case has been made for the impact bullying has on the lives of young adults across the world, the search continues for the most effective of intervention. School districts in the state of Pennsylvania are required to have a bullying policy in their school system, updated regularly with consequences for the offenders explicitly stated. In addition to the school policies, schools work to combat bullying behavior. They intervene using whole group approaches with assemblies and programs that involve even the bus drivers, small group tactics that have students with similar experiences work together to change their behavior or increase their confidence, and one-on-one interventions with parents and students, all in the hopes of making schools safer places for its students.

Methods Used to Impact Aggressive Behaviors in Schools

In the battle to end bullying, schools seek proven methods of intervention. Multiple theories exist as to the most effective way to assist victims, bullies, and bystanders. From whole school inclusive methods to individualistic approaches, the goal remains the same: to end bullying, make students feel safe and welcome in their buildings, and in their school communities. As a result of these interventions, the plan is that the students can increase their focus on education and reduce the outside interruptions that can make students lose interest in academics. The first of these approaches incorporates the whole building as a social system used to combat bullying behaviors.

Comprehensive (Social Learning Theory) Approach to Bully Prevention

The National Association of School Psychologists position on school bullying states that it is a school's "legal responsibility to provide a safe and supportive school for

its students”. They go on to discuss the benefits of a school-wide approach to bully prevention as one which establishes

clear practices and policies that emphasize prevention; regularly assess and monitor needs and effectiveness of efforts; implements timely and consistent prevention and intervention strategies; provides social, emotional, and mental health supports for students involved in bullying, including bullies, victims, and bystanders; encourages positive discipline; and elicits engagement and commitment by all members of the school community (Rossen & Cowan, 2012).

When searching for bully prevention programs, the results can be overwhelming.

Nationally recognized programs for bully prevention are research-based and supported by government programs and departments.

The Olweus Bully Prevention Program is a well-known program used in school districts across the United States. The history of the program is rooted in research and although the cost is substantial, the outcomes are positive. A study done in 2009 looked to establish validity of the Bully Victim Questionnaire which is the primary method used in this program to determine where intervention needs to be placed (Beaty & Cornell, 2009). Obviously, the concern is if students are not truthful in their reporting, the results will be skewed and, therefore, the intervention choices also skewed. Students were more apt to report being victims than bullies, and although there were limitations to the study which are typical for self-reporting methods, as long as that method was not the only one used for data collection, the overall validity of the questionnaire stood as valid and reliable.

The Olweus Bully Prevention Program (OBPP) has multiple components. Adults are trained and certified to implement the program, and a licensed OBPP trainer does this training. Guides are provided for the school and teachers that are differentiated according to elementary, middle and high school. The bully survey questionnaire is provided and curricular guides for hosting classroom meetings that are a weekly occurrence in the classroom. The program includes resources that are required and then suggested which broaden the spectrum to include bus drivers, cafeteria workers and also community members. This information was found on the website www.violencepreventionworks.org. The website also has links for grant availabilities to assist in funding the program, online courses for professionals, and includes additional information about Internet bullying and dating violence. This comprehensive approach to all types of bullying and relationship concerns is a likely reason it is used among many school districts and why its name is so well known.

When looking at comprehensive bully prevention programs in western Pennsylvania, the Olweus Bully Prevention Program is promoted through the Center for Safe Schools (Center for Safe Schools, 2015). Although other comprehensive bully prevention programs exist (Bully Busters, KiVa, Steps to Respect), The Pennsylvania Bullying Prevention Network is a professional learning community for bullying prevention consultants that receives funding through the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. All members of this network are certified OBPP trainers. Furthermore, in a partnership with the Center for Safe Schools and the Highmark Foundation, “over 260 schools were provided the resources and materials to implement the Olweus Bully Prevention Program” through

grant opportunities since 2006. These distinguishing factors, along with the research that surrounds the success of the program, is why the Olweus Bully Prevention Program is what most schools in western Pennsylvania select when wanting a comprehensive program.

In 2011, a study was completed looking at the effectiveness of the Olweus Bully Prevention Program in an urban/suburban middle school in the northeastern United States. When looking at the data collected over a year with 112 middle school students and 17 teachers, the results were positive. The study showed a statistically significant impact on the effects of operating the program for a year. The teachers were able to more easily identify bullying and talk to bullies and victims alike. Students reported less occurrences of bullying behavior and exclusion behaviors (Bowlan, 2011). This study demonstrated the need for bully awareness programs for both school staff as well as students in order for a change to take place.

A larger group of middle schools were evaluated as to the effectiveness of the OBPP in 2007. Data were collected from ten middle schools. After implementation of the program, reports of relational and physical bullying decreased significantly (Bauer, Lozano, & Rivara, 2007). Continuing to examine the research from a global perspective, studies completed in Malaysia and Iran also showed the same positive results (Esteki Azad & Amiri, 2012; Yaakub, Haron, & Leong, 2010). Studies completed from a global perspective demonstrated the consistency in this type of comprehensive bully prevention program being an adequate choice for middle schools across the world.

Another whole group method of bully intervention and prevention originated from the Columbine tragedy (www.rachelschallenge.org). Rachel Scott was the first student

shot and killed by Dylan Harris and Eric Klebold and as a result, her family has made it their mission to spread kindness, which was one of Rachel's mantras. They speak of not only bullying in particular during their presentation, but also their large assemblies work to encourage students create a chain reaction of kindness toward one another. This methodology doesn't simply tell students to stop bullying, it gives them an alternate way to behave, and provides realistic ideas to begin immediately. This program also includes a parent presentation and small group leadership training along with supplemental materials. Rachel's Challenge is a comprehensive program meant to impact change in an entire school building and a demonstration of positive change coming from very tragic situations.

Often times more regular and intensive work is necessary to change the behaviors of bullies, increase the confidence of the victims, or give power to the bystanders. This is where small, common group interventions are most appropriate.

Common Group – Socio-Cultural Phenomenon

Another seemingly effective means of bully prevention and intervention is the small or common group approach. In this approach, students with commonalities are placed within a small group and activities are completed in order to assist in developing normal functioning skills and prevention of continued maladaptive behaviors. Also referred to as psychoeducational groups, these students may be used to assist in presenting to the student body in an attempt to become leaders within their school and also to have an opportunity to practice what they have learned during the time spent in common groups. Bringing bullies, victims, or bystanders together is another method of intervention and prevention that has been recognized as effective.

The Journal for Specialists in Group Work discusses a model for working with small groups of victims with the school counselor. Solving Problems Together is a school-based small group process that enables students to face a problem and then learn real-life skills for handling that problem. This approach has been used from primary grades through high school with success (Hall, 2006). The article goes on to discuss the importance of group selection when composing participants. It is suggested that a pre-test is given to identify common traits of aggression, passiveness, and assertiveness in order to best place the students into the appropriate settings. Once placed, the facilitator can then set objectives and activities based on the common threads of which the group is made. The author states that the students, although apprehensive about beginning the group, were made to feel empowered and confident when the group terminated. A post-test revealed that lessons learned during the sessions were now put to use in real-life settings. However, the counselor was unable to determine if the success of the program was due to the gatherings or due to being with those who had commonalities. The author reinforced this type of intervention by stating, “many school counselors use group therapy as an efficient tool for influencing the school environment” (Hall, 2006, p. 213). Although one study has been completed, broader research needs to be done to determine outcomes on a larger scale, but the outlook is positive and demonstrates small group bully prevention sessions are another viable option for students.

Looking outside the comprehensive school-based programs, an article in the Journal of School Health examined the efficacy of a social-emotional and positive youth behavior program (Domino, 2013). Take the Lead is a program for middle school students specifically. The course of the 16-lesson curriculum is “designed to increase the

social competencies of participants on a broad spectrum of social skills including, self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, decision making, problem solving, and leadership” (Domino, 2013, p. 431). Teachers are trained to deliver the curriculum and parents are offered an educational workshop. Students met on a weekly basis in small groups to develop socialization, decision-making, relationship, and self-management skills. By using a quantitative pre and post questionnaire, the data demonstrated a significant reduction in reported bullying and victimization; therefore, the program was seen as successful. Although this study was limited to one middle school, further research would need to be completed in order to evaluate the overall success of a program such as this on a larger scale. However, the promise of small group intervention was seen as one that is positive and noteworthy.

Individual Interventions – A Person-Centered Approach

Yet another common method of intervention and bully prevention works with the individual child. Examining personality differences and the individual roles that each student has within their school and peer group, a person-centered approach is yet another resource which is utilized by many school systems to try and correct individual behaviors. In order to understand the impact this approach has on students, one must examine the personality correlation to bully, victim, and bystander behaviors to determine which individual approach is most effective. Also examining the family on an individual basis can assist in developing the best approach for the school to use with the child. Additionally, perspectives from teachers examining the students on an individual basis have the potential to greatly impact the methods used for bully intervention.

Recent studies are beginning to examine the correlation between personality traits and the role a child plays within the bullying triad of bully, victim and bystander. In a study completed in 2014, utilizing a personality-centered approach, researchers examined the correlation between school bullying among high school students and personality type. Close to 400 students were sampled and the bullies scored highest on aggression, the victims highest on neuroticism, and the bystanders seemed to be most well adjusted among all three groups. This study demonstrated a definite grouping of three clusters of students based on personality attributes and aggressive behaviors. These three groups were adapted students who tended to not become involved in aggressive behaviors, students who were most often the recipient of the aggressive behaviors, and those students who were the aggressors in bullying situations. “The results of this study indicated the role of certain temperamental traits in the development and manifestation specific maladaptive pattern of social interaction” (Kodžopeljić, Smederevac, Mitrović, Dinić, & Čolović, 2014, p. 754).

Both bullying and prejudice-discrimination literature strongly suggest that social and interpersonal dominance are key personality factors in aggression of all ages (Hoover, 2005). In a study completed which looked into the relationship of personality and bullying role, teachers reported friendliness was the most consistent predictor of where the adolescent falls (Tani, Greenman, Schneider, & Fregoso, 2003). It was reported that teachers perceived a lack of friendliness and elevated emotional stability in both bullies and victims. Additionally, victims were reported low on the friendliness and conscientiousness scales, bullies scores high on extraversion and low on agreeableness,

and defenders showed low emotional stability that demonstrated they were less likely to be self-conscious or have trouble regulating emotions.

Personality traits need to be assessed when looking at students' individual behaviors and interactions with peers. In considering the discipline some bullies are faced with as a result of their conduct, it stands to reason that they do not stop the aggressive behaviors because it is simply who they are, it is intrinsic and part of their personality. Conversely, perhaps victims never stand up to a bully because they are lacking the personality traits that would give them the confidence to do so.

The Five-Factor (Big Five) Model is one of the most accepted methods in determining personality traits (Scholte et al., 2005). According to this model, personality can be described in five different areas: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability (neuroticism), and openness to experience. Using this method, individuals can be categorized according to personality traits and then behaviors can be compared, similarities and differences examined. Ron Scholte (2005) looked into adolescent personality types and subtypes with regards to bullying using the Big Five Model and a self-reported person-centered approach. His final sample size was 3,284 adolescents from the Netherlands who ranged in age from 12-18 years old. The students completed a 27-item questionnaire that was based on the Big Five model and was analyzed along with a bully survey.

Scholte determined there to be three main personality subtypes: resilient, overcontrollers, and undercontrollers. Overcontrollers express low extraversion and emotional stability, high conscientiousness, and a moderate degree of agreeableness and openness. When examining at these students, they tended to have high school scores, but

lacked social skills and displayed emotional problems. They were characterized as having more tendencies to show bullying behavior. Undercontrollers showed moderate to high extraversion and low agreeableness and conscientiousness. These students academically were below average, less accepted by their peers, and exhibited behavior problems. These students were more apt to be the victims of bullying behavior. Resilient students were high in all areas of the Big Five model and were typically not involved in neither bully nor victim behavior. These students also had the highest self-esteem, the lowest levels of loneliness and the lowest levels of physical complaints in comparison to their peers.

Another study completed by Franca Tani in 2003 corroborated his findings; however she did not use the subtype names. She examined personality traits of bullies, victims and defenders and analyzed the findings based on commonalities. The data were collected from teacher reports from two public schools in Central Italy in which they were asked to classify 96 students by using the Participant Role Scale, which is similar to the Big Five model. Although the terminology differed, the themes were consistent. Teachers reported that bullies tended to have low levels of friendliness, agreeableness, and high energy. Defenders displayed high friendliness and low emotional stability. Victims displayed low friendliness and conscientiousness and high emotional stability. Tani stated, “The results suggest that personality traits might contribute to children’s typical behavior in bullying situations.” (2003, p. 142)

School Counselors and Bullying

School counselors are charged with maintaining the stability of the adolescent’s emotional status, relationship capacity, and educational success all while communicating

with parents and responding to the needs of high stakes testing, much of which is now falling into the counselors' hands to prepare, disseminate, secure and return. The task of students maintaining healthy relationships at the middle school level is almost a full-time job, especially with the inception of social media and the Internet into their young lives. Now, bullying behaviors and aggression can be felt twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and that does have a toll on their success in and out of the school building.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) states that all counselors “recognize the need for students to attend school in a safe, orderly, and caring environment which is essential for learning” (2011). They also go on to discuss the role of the counselor as being one that encourages safe school policies, participates in school-wide efforts to intervene and educate regarding bully prevention, and educate students on communication, conflict resolution, and intrapersonal skills. According to the ASCA, they are also to provide programs for parents, community and staff on the topics of safe schools, violence prevention and relationship building. Although they do not recommend one particular program or type of intervention over another, they suggest that a comprehensive educational approach be taken, no matter what form.

In a study discussing real-world interventions to bullying, a three-tier approach is described. Tier one is the whole-school, comprehensive approach to combat bullying over a broad spectrum, tier two works with small groups such as classrooms and those with commonalities and tier three being individual student interventions (Lund, Blake, Ewing, & Banks, 2012). This study looked to evaluate what counselors are choosing as strategies for bully prevention using a national sample of school psychologists and counselors. They looked at the training given to these professionals in the area of bully

prevention and intervention, the strategies and programs that were implemented, by whom they are chosen and under what criteria they are proposed. Twenty percent of the people in the study identified bullying as a problem in their schools, with verbal teasing and exclusion making up the majority of the type of bullying which occurs. A majority of these people (80%) also stated that they have received training in some shape or form, albeit through professional development or conferences. When asked what they do when handling a situation of aggression, they typically discuss meeting with the student one on one, also working with the bully in redirecting the behavior, and calling the parents to make them aware of the situation.

Although these people are the professionals who are directly responsible for being the first responders in these situations, a small percentage of them had a hand in determining what the bullying program was in their school, although over 75% of them said a bully intervention and prevention program was in place. It stands to reason that school counselors would have an additional perspective on this issue and yet this study was limited in the fact that it did not look into why programs were chosen and by whom. That area of research would be beneficial as an addition to this topic.

Research completed in 2009 looked at the varying perceptions of bullying in schools based on a mixed methods study with students, administrators, teachers and counselors. One of the major results of this study is that what constitutes bullying and whether it is a problem or not varies by the individual. Some counselors spoke to the acts of aggression as a problem, yet others said it was not, but in reporting incidents, had a larger report of incidents than those who said it was a concern (Newgent et al., 2009). Students, parents and school staff all seem to have different levels of tolerance and

acceptance for bullying behaviors and the research suggests that developing a common definition for aggressive behavior be developed in order to provide more continuity to the awareness and recognition of bully actions. This study does suggest an area for additional research involving school counselors and the impact of bully intervention techniques.

A study looking into counselors' responses to bullying situations seemed to have a similar outcome. Data were collected from 183 counselors with varying levels of experience and training from all levels K-12. All counselors were located in Arizona. The author stated that in 2007, when this study was completed, there were "no studies found in the existing literature that examined school counselors and bullying" (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007, p. 2). The purpose was to add to the literature on bullying by looking at the school counselor's perspective. The results were similar to what has been demonstrated in other studies, namely that although all counselors viewed similar behaviors as aggressive and noncompliant, they varied on their opinions of what exactly constituted bully behavior. Counselors also reported that physical bullying is easier to recognize and intervene than relational bullying which is typically more covert. Finally, counselors who reported having bully prevention training were more readily able to recognize acts of bullying, categorize them, and handle them appropriately.

Summary

The topic of bullying is currently in the forefront of academic literature and is also beginning to be seen in literature discussing workplace bullying with adults. With so many people having experienced aggressive behaviors in one way or another, it manages to touch an abundance of lives. The violence that can arise as a result of continued

verbal, physical, or relational bullying has caused multiple tragedies and forced many school systems to reexamine what they are doing to prevent and intervene in student aggression. School districts are spending large amounts of money on comprehensive bully prevention programs, bringing in outside organizations and utilizing the school counselors to run small intervention groups of bullies, victims, and bystanders, and also charging school counselors with one-on-one interventions with students and their families. Through examining the existing literature in a thoughtful and purposeful way by first investigating the literature regarding the individual people involved in bullying situations, namely the bully, the victim, and the bystander, then studying various methods of intervention utilized in schools presently and finally attempting to determine the role the school counselor plays in all of it, the overall concept of creating safe schools through bully prevention and intervention is one that needs to continually be researched.

Although the large amount of articles, books, dissertations and the like are overwhelming, most seem to suggest that further exploration is still required and none have determined something to be a sure fix for bullying. Bullying is definitely viewed as a large problem of serious concern, not only in the school system, but also outside of the educational setting and on the Internet. Therefore, it is crucial to learn more about what causes people to behave in this manner and how we can empower the victims to be able to advocate for themselves. School counselors play an imperative role in the school system when handling these types of situations, yet the literature demonstrates that they are not always involved in the process of choosing what type of intervention is placed in the school. Additionally, there seems to be a continual disparity in what is viewed as bullying as opposed to what is simply seen as typical adolescent behavior. This is where

training comes into play, and is a way to provide consistency to the school staff on recognizing and reporting acts of bullying. Through thoughtful examination of the existing literature, this study hoped to add to and provide a useful, research-based tool for school counselors to use when determining the best method of intervention for middle school students who are bullies, victims, or bystanders.

Chapter Two discussed the history of aggression and how it has manifested itself into school systems, the variety of participants in bullying situations, along with theories that suggest common beliefs for the causes of bully, victim and bystander behaviors, and common intervention techniques implemented by educators. Chapter Three will examine the setting of the study, discuss the research technique implemented, elaborate on participant information, and explain how the data will be analyzed.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the procedures and methodology which were used to explore the experiences middle school counselors in Southwestern Pennsylvania have with bully, victim, and bystander behaviors. Additionally, it examined the data to determine which methods were utilized to assist in preventing bullies from being aggressive, empowering bystanders to intervene when witnessing an act of bullying, and building the confidence of victims in order for them to defend themselves against these negative acts. Finally, the study looked to determine which bully prevention and intervention programs the counselors viewed as most successful and on what basis they made this determination.

School violence has become an increasingly important concern over the past decades. Many times, the trigger for violent acts committed by students has been rooted in bullying. A significant number of quantitative studies have been completed with students, parents, and school staff members and have resulted in raising awareness, identifying parameters and key issues regarding the topic of bullying. The results are consistent in reporting that the issues of school bullying behavior is worldwide, bullying happens most often at the middle school level, and the impact it has on its victims is lasting. However, digging deeper into the perceptions of the school counselor regarding intervention strategies is an area where the research seems to be lacking, even though these professionals are the ones who typically deal with these situations, determine the level of seriousness, and make contacts with families. Developing stronger theories on

bullying intervention techniques and programs can assist in creating better links between the quantitative research findings (Dixon, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Bullying behavior has been a topic of interest since the early 1970s when Dan Olweus began to research patterns of aggression among males (Olweus, 1972, 1978). Additionally, the increase in school violence, especially with tragic events like the one which occurred in Columbine (Cullen, 2009) and then locally in Southwestern Pennsylvania at Franklin Regional High School (Hardway, 2014), created an additional sense of urgency among school districts to provide a safe and secure environment for their students. Although bullying is reported to be most common at the middle school level (Dranoff, 2006; S. Harris & Petrie, 2002; McManis, 2012; Ramsey, 2010; Seals, 2002), schools across the world have implemented various strategies for combating aggressive behaviors. Comprehensive, school-based programs are meant to impact all students and staff within the school community, however, based on the commonalities of the students or even their individual differences, those comprehensive approaches might not be enough to make a lasting change. School counselors are quite often charged with being the first line of contact for those who are facing bullying behavior (Cunningham & Whitten, 2007). These counselors are then to choose which method of intervention they should take with each varying situation. Small group approaches and individual prevention strategies are among available therapeutic interventions which can be chosen by counselors, but how they view success and what measurements are used to determine success is an area that needed to be researched further. By investigating the experiences and training of school counselors, along with the methods and approaches they take when

dealing with middle school students, it was the hope of this researcher to be able to add to the existing literature by creating a more purposeful set of information which will provide counselors and administrators with a pairing of useful strategies and methods to combat bullying behavior, assist victims in becoming more confident, and empower bystanders to intervene when they see bullying occur.

Instrumentation

In order to be able to determine what school counselors view as successful in the battle against bullying behaviors, multiple approaches were considered. Although quantitative means could have been implemented through a survey and open ended responses, the researcher worked to obtain a deeper understanding behind the thought process and experiences which counselors utilized in order to work with this population of students. Therefore, a phenomenological methodology, which examines experience in a deep and meaningful way and seeks to provide a deeper understanding through data of a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2013), was the technique which was deemed most appropriate and gave the richness of data that was being sought.

The phenomenological framework, namely middle school counselors and their experiences with students involved in bullying, on which this study was based, drove the information collected and the interview technique; additionally, looking at a positive paradigm versus a naturalist one was also taken into consideration. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012),

Positivists claim there is a single, objective reality that can be observed and measured without bias using standardized instruments. Naturalists and, in particular, interpretive constructionists, accept that there is a reality but argue that

it cannot be measured directly, only perceived by people, each of whom views it through the lens of his or her prior experience, knowledge, and expectations. That lens affects what people see and how they interpret what they find. What we know, then, is not objective; it is always filtered through people, always subjective (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p.15).

When delving into the phenomenon of bullying, the experiences of the people who are charged with working with bullies, victims, and bystanders brought their personal experiences to their methods of intervention. This “lens”, as was stated by Rubin (2012), is going to make a difference in how they handle situations and what they see as success, once again making this descriptive phenomenological study, utilizing a semi-structured interview technique, deemed to be the most appropriate method.

Although interviews have been conducted with school counselors in other research, none specifically were seeking the same outcome as this study. Therefore, based on the research questions, a set of interview questions needed to be developed. These questions were cultural in nature, dealt with a certain group of individuals, and sought to learn what happened through an event or set of events (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), namely the experiences they have had with middle school students and aggressive behaviors, the amount of training and experience they have received, and how they choose which methods to select for the students when working toward prevention and intervention. This method was more appropriate than a topical interview technique due to the fact that these individuals bring more experiences to their decisions than one particular answer or reason for determining the behavior they choose to use. At times, due to the nature of the study, both approaches might have overlapped one another and

the topic of bullying were discussed, but more so from a cultural point of view, where each individual brought their personal experiences into light.

The interview was designed to be semi-structured and conversational in order to gain the most information and not necessarily allow a script to determine the outcome of the interaction between the researcher and the participant. A set of questions was determined in advance (Appendix A), and then follow-up questions and probes were determined based on the responses of the interviewee. This responsive technique was necessary when discussing the emotionally charged topic of bullying. In order to make the participant feel comfortable and build a level of trust between the contributor and the researcher, a more conversational tone was utilized.

Research Questions

The overall research questions follow:

1. What types of experiences have school counselors had with bullying behavior?
2. What philosophies of intervention have school counselors utilized with regards to the bully, victim, and bystander, and how do these counselors determine which approach is most appropriate?
3. What types of training have school counselors received with regards to bully prevention and intervention, and based on this training and level of experience, which philosophy or method of intervention do the counselors believe to be most successful and most frequently utilized?

Population Sample and Research Setting

Multiple studies have found that bullying prevalence is at its highest at the middle school level (Harris, 2005; McManis, 2012; Walsh, 2005; Roberts Jr., 2000). It is for this

reason that guidance counselors who work at the middle school level in Southwestern Pennsylvania with grades six through eight were chosen to participate in this study. Additionally, with an act of school violence happening in 2014 within Southwestern Pennsylvania (Hardway, 2014), the subject of bullying is now one which hit close to home.

Southwestern Pennsylvania encompasses ten counties, Lawrence, Beaver, Butler, Armstrong, Indiana, Allegheny, Westmoreland, Washington, Fayette, and Greene, and is home to 96 middle schools. By wanting to obtain the most comprehensive data of middle schools in Southwestern Pennsylvania, a homogeneous and purposeful sample of two middle schools from each county were selected and building administrators were approached to give permission for the researcher to contact their counselor(s) to participate in this study. Eleven school principals from seven counties in western Pennsylvania responded to the request to contact. From that point, the eleven middle schools' counselors were contacted. All who were asked to participate were currently working as school counselors within middle schools in these seven counties making up the region of Southwestern Pennsylvania and their anonymity was ensured. Out of those who were contacted, six counselors from four counties responded that they were willing to participate. A consent form was made available to the participants stating that any identifiable information was removed from the documentation immediately after completion of the interview, and once signed by the participant, would be kept in a secure area for a period of five years, and then destroyed. Additionally, the form detailed how the researcher utilized an identifier for the purpose of presenting the information that will in no way be related to the interview subject. By utilizing these methods systematically,

both privacy and confidentiality was maintained, and assisted in building a level of trust prior to the data being collected. Selecting middle schools from each of ten counties that make up western Pennsylvania gave the researcher twenty possible middle school participants and perhaps even more school counselors from which purposeful data were gained. While selecting middle schools to participate, the process was also one that took into account the willingness of the district to participate and the permission of the administration to contact the counselor along with the counselor's agreement to be interviewed. Although this selection process might have also been perceived as a convenience sample, it was the hope of the researcher to obtain perspectives from employees of different sized districts with assorted years of experience and training in bully prevention and intervention.

Pilot Study

The pilot study was completed with a small group of counselors and was selected by a convenience sample of middle school counselors in the researcher's demographic area. The researcher utilized the same research protocol as listed in this chapter, and the interviews were completed at their availability and convenience. The researcher then, at the closing of the interview, asked for their feedback on the interview questions and conversation details, hoping to gain some insight into what they saw as possible pitfalls to the interview and their suggestions for improvement. They were also provided with a written transcript of the conversation in order to qualify their responses or add to anything that might have been discussed during the interview. The researcher completed this process this with three participants, each one consecutively after the other, and made any necessary changes once the researcher completed the one prior, in anticipation that

by the third and final one, the study was be ready to use in the field. If the researcher had found after the third interview that changes still needed to be made, the researcher would have located an additional person with whom to pilot this study and continued until the researcher was sure the methodology was solid and the interview protocol was obtaining the results based on the research questions. This was not the case, so only three participants were used for the pilot study.

Pilot Results

Two middle school and one high school counselor were participants in the pilot study using a semi-structured interview process that then concluded with open dialogue about the interview protocol and question quality and clarity. One counselor made the suggestion that one of the original questions which was asking counselors to describe their “approach that goes along with the school’s philosophy of bully prevention and intervention,” be changed to, “What methods or curriculum does your school use for bully prevention?” This counselor stated that asking for a philosophy might be difficult, but when asked for methods or curriculum, it makes more sense to school counselors and therefore is easier to answer. When the other counselors were asked their opinion, they agreed and therefore it was changed.

Additionally, other suggestions that were made were to eliminate or further explain some of the questions due to the similarity of some of the questions and fear of getting redundant responses. For example, one question asked about experiences in dealing with bully behaviors, and another question asks what experiences do you have with bullies, victims and bystanders. The second question seemed to be very similar and needed to be further explained so that deeper meaning can be gained when discussing

bullies, victims, and bystanders on an individual basis. The researcher also made note throughout this pilot where the questions might need to be teased out verbally during the interviews, which was helpful. Additionally, one other question was omitted from the final interview question bank because it was asking the same question in two different ways, in the counselors' opinions.

The pilot study was very helpful. The counselors were open and honest in their critique of the questions, the interview protocol, and the ability of the researcher to get thoughtful information from the process. Their suggestions were very similar to one another, and therefore, the changes they suggested were made, and notes were taken by the researcher during the process in order to ensure that during the interview process the most useful data were gathered, that good follow-up questions were asked, that clarification was provided where necessary and would allow the participants to elaborate on their personal experiences.

Interview

The semi-scripted interview question protocol was a basis for the interview, and was related directly to the research questions. Although as previously stated, a semi-structured approach was used in order to allow the interviewee to share information he or she deems as pertinent to the study. However, in order to cover the breadth of the information the researcher wanted to gather, topics were directly related to the research questions and were discussed at some point during the conversation (Appendix A).

Research Procedures

Prior to communicating with any school districts, permission was granted by the Institutional Review Board of Indiana University of Pennsylvania for each individual

middle school to be contacted. Through this permission, the researcher ensured that high levels of ethics and integrity were maintained throughout the study. Additionally, confidentiality was maintained with all participants and complete confidentiality was assured through an initial principal/ superintendent consent document (Appendix B).

Access to the school counselors was gained in stages, with first contact being made to their respective principal through phone calls and email communication methods. Once verbal consent was obtained, a letter was sent to the administrator for review. Once the administrator sent an email with his or her approval for the researcher to conduct the research, the researcher then utilized the same methods of communication to contact that principal's school counselor(s) and provided them with the same research proposal and consent documentation.

Understanding the administrators' various duties, the researcher found that most phone calls were unanswered, the researcher then left a voicemail asking the counselor to check his or her email for further explanation and documentation explaining the study. In the email, the researcher included a detailed letter (Appendix B) that explained the purpose and details of the study, along with a copy of the interview questions for his or her review prior to obtaining his or her consent. Understanding that this approach is a multi-level one to gain participants in this study, once consent was gained from the administrator, the researcher moved on to contact the school counselor(s) in each building and not wait until all consent documents were returned from all districts.

When contacting the counselor, the researcher used a phone call prior to sending any information through email. This method of communication allowed the researcher to have a detailed conversation with each counselor, explaining what the researcher planned

to accomplish through the research study, the purpose of the study, and risks and safeguards taken to ensure confidentiality and privacy. Once the counselor agreed to read the information, the researcher sent a detailed letter describing the study, an informed consent form (Appendix C and D) and a copy of the interview question protocol. The form explained that the counselor had the right to discontinue his or her participation at any time, and that his or her participation was completely voluntary with no pressure to participate. These steps will all be taken in hopes of gaining his or her participation. Once the researcher received the consent to participate, a mutually convenient place and time was scheduled to conduct each one-on-one interview at a place of the counselor's determination. It was the researcher's hope that through this population sample able, a true picture of the population of school counselors in Southwestern Pennsylvania would be obtained, which included varying levels of experience, training in bully prevention and intervention techniques and programs and also suggestions for intervention techniques based on what they have tried and found to be successful and unsuccessful.

The interview was held face to face for all participants at a mutually convenient time and place as suggested by the participant. If a face-to-face interview was not possible, yet the person desired to participate, then a phone interview was scheduled as an alternative. During the interview process, the conversation was recorded for accuracy and the researcher took annotated notes. Additionally, as a follow up, the researcher requested any additional documents that the interviewee felt might add to the research study, such as public school documents regarding bully prevention techniques and trainings, professional materials, and any other sources that the participant felt would be helpful to the researcher. This additional information was not required, but suggested.

Once the interview ended, the transcript of the conversation and notes which were taken was made available to the participant in order to verify the accuracy of the information gathered and the fairness in interpreting the notes which were taken during the interview, otherwise known as member checking (Cresswell, 2012). This was done through email and the participants were asked to send a return email validating the accuracy of the transcript before the researcher moved on. Additionally, the participants were assigned a participant number to serve as an identifier. These participant numbers were changed to pseudonyms for the remainder of the study. The participant had the opportunity to make any clarifications or additions to the transcript and summary of the conversation at that time. Recordings, transcripts, additional documents and notes which may identify counselors by letter name only will be saved for five years after completion of this study and then destroyed.

Analyzing the information provided by the participants not only in order to answer the research questions, but also to examine the results according to the theories of intervention discussed triangulated the data. The theories included in this study were Comprehensive Social Learning Theory, Common Group Theory, and Person-Centered Theory. This method of studying data is referred to as Theory Triangulation and can “enable a deeper understanding of the research as investigators can explore different ways to make sense of the data” (Rothbauer, 2008) and provide an additional means of validity and credibility to the study.

Data Analysis

According to Robert Weiss, analysis should begin as soon as data is collected and not wait until all information is obtained (Weiss, 1994) and was ongoing throughout the

interview process. In order to best analyze and interpret the information, the researcher first prepared the data to be analyzed through transcription of both the recorded sessions individually and also the notes which were taken during the interview. It is during this time that any themes or commonalities were noted and coded for utilization in the research report and were based on the initial research questions. Coding, sorting, local integration and inclusive integration began as the interviews were completed, added to the data with each additional interview until a point of saturation was reached. Coding through the qualitative data analysis software, NVIVO, was used in order to obtain a deep level of analysis with a large amount of unstructured data, such as interview transcripts. Additionally, the accounts documented in the transcriptions of the interviews were linked to the research questions posed for this study. The cases were also analyzed and classified according to issue-based commonalities and differences. Additionally, themes, events, and examples which were gathered through the interview process from multiple perspectives were collected, identified, and noted through an ethnographic approach (Creswell, 2012).

Phenomenological research describes the meaning for multiple individuals of their experiences of a concept or a phenomenon with the purpose being to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence of that phenomenon. The researcher collected data from the people who had experienced that particular phenomenon and worked to explain what they experienced and any commonalities that arose as a result of the data collection (Creswell, 2012, p. 464). This type of research design was focused on shared patterns that were developed over a group of people, namely, for the sake of this study, middle school counselors in Southwestern

Pennsylvania. This study was done with multiple cases (i.e. school counselors) and sought to provide insight into the intervention and prevention strategies used to combat bullying by middle school counselors. The data were reported in a narrative fashion, and discussed common themes and patterns that emerged when the data were analyzed. The research findings were based on the semi-structured interviews that were conducted along with any additional documentation that was provided by the counselors. Themes were developed through careful and thoughtful examination of the data, and was unbiased and objective.

Due to the tremendous amount of data secured through quantitative means, this process of categorizing the data also served to eliminate information that was not found to be useful for the purpose of this study. The data were continually reorganized and divided into common categories based on the responses as well as separating quotes taken from the transcripts in order to better emphasize a point or commonality from multiple participants. Finally, once the information collection was completed and the categorization complete, the researcher asked the assistance of two readers who were familiar with the study to read over the emerging themes for readability and cohesion and also to ensure the researcher was not demonstrating any bias toward the subject or the responses. All of these steps and methods for purposefully and thoughtfully interpreting and analyzing the data assisted in making the information credible, reliable, and unbiased.

Summary

Bullying is a focus of school systems worldwide. Many researchers have attempted to determine the root cause of aggressive behaviors, why victims do not stand

up for themselves, and how bystanders can feel more empowered. Although the literature is extensive on the topic of bullying, no decisive information can be provided for educators giving one means of combating the problem. The causes behind behaviors in the bullying triad can often seem to be as individual as the person himself. However, some attempts have been successful and have been replicated in school districts with a noted decrease in the negative behavior. This study hoped to add to the research by adding more information about what methods are most successful as seen by those who are dealing with it daily, namely school counselors. Chapter Three discussed the research techniques, participants who were studied, research instruments used, and plans for data collection and analysis. Chapter Four will focus on the data collected from the semi-structured interviews with middle school counselors and the analysis of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the role of the school counselor in middle schools within Southwestern Pennsylvania in regards to bullying situations. By speaking with these counselors regarding what they have experienced with bullying behaviors, what intervention strategies they have found the most success, and what suggestions they have for assisting all parties of the bullying triad (bully, victim, and bystander), it was the intention of the researcher to develop a set of suggested best practices for administrators and counselors at the middle school level. Qualitative data were collected from one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with 6 school counselors in western Pennsylvania who work in middle schools. The data were then reviewed to determine what experiences the counselors have had with bullies, victims, and bystanders, what intervention and prevention strategies they have implemented, and to what degree of success each has been met. The interview questions were developed to correlate with the following research questions:

1. What types of experiences have middle school guidance counselors had with bullying behavior?
2. What philosophies of intervention have school counselors utilized with regards to the bully, victim, and bystander and how do these counselors determine which approach is most appropriate?
3. What types of training have school counselors received with regards to bully prevention and intervention, and based on this training and level of experience, which philosophy or

method of intervention do the counselors believe to be most successful and most frequently utilized?

Review of Interview Process, Data Collection, and Analysis

Prior to obtaining IRB approval, 28 middle school administrators were purposefully sampled from the ten counties making up western Pennsylvania (Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington and Westmoreland Counties) and contacted in order to obtain their written permission to contact the school counselor. Out of the administrators contacted, 11 principals in seven counties gave permission to contact their school counselor(s). Once that approval was granted and IRB approval was obtained, the school counselors were contacted through email, describing the nature of the study and asking for their willingness to participate. The final sample included 6 participants from four counties in western Pennsylvania. One-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted over a three-week period. These interviews were recorded and then transcribed using an online transcription service for the purpose of accuracy and coding. The transcripts were then returned to the participant for member checking. The participants had the opportunity to further clarify what was in the transcription and verify the accuracy of the transcription through email, phone call, or a face-to-face meeting. One participant clarification was obtained and verification for accuracy was received, the transcription was then coded and analyzed for common themes.

Participants' Demographic Data

All counselors whose administrator gave permission to contact were contacted and offered the opportunity to participate. All counselors who were contacted were

female. Six school counselors responded and agreed to participate. The counselors were all certified school counselors with a minimum of 7 years of experience in working with middle school aged students in grades six through eight. In order to conceal the identities of these counselors, each was assigned a label according to when their interview took place. Participant One is labeled P1; Participant 2 is P2, and so on through P6 (Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Data for Counselor Participants

Participant Number	County in Western Pennsylvania	Years Spent as a Middle School Counselor
P1	Fayette	19
P2	Washington	16
P3	Butler	9
P4	Allegheny	9
P5	Allegheny	13
P6	Allegheny	9

Teacher Responses to In-Depth Interview

The interview participants were asked a series of questions regarding their experience in dealing with bullying issues, specifically with the bully, the victim, and the bystander. They were also asked what theory of intervention and prevention their school employed and how that curriculum made an impact on how they handled bullying situations. Finally, they were asked about what professional development opportunities

they have had, and based on that professional development, what intervention techniques have been found to be most useful and most impactful on the bully, the victim, and the bystander. These questions were then analyzed according to the associated research question. Counselors were asked to not only share their experiences, but also to explain any intervention techniques they use and what techniques are deemed successful. The coding and analysis of the interviews are discussed in correlation with the overarching research questions and will be organized by those questions that are listed below.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 1 – Experiences with Bullying

Participants were asked to first discuss their experiences with bullying situations. This comprehensive question was meant to illicit responses on a broad scale in order to see if any common themes emerged. Almost all participants started the conversation by stating that their experiences with true bullying situations were limited if you are to look at situations in correlation with the truest definition of bullying. However, each participant did explain that many of the students and parents are unaware of the difference between bullying and conflict, stating that they are being bullied when it is actually conflict between peers. The participant responses are outlined below.

Participant 1 Response

What I try to do is really to distinguish what is bullying and what is not bullying. I think in today's society, we're very quick to label that "my child's being bullied". When you actually get down to it and sort it out, it's actually not a bullying-type of situation. I've learned this from past practice.

Participant 5 Response

I think it's important, back to your question, to really see like, is it bullying or is it not bullying? What I found that I have a lot of 'he said/she said' in my school. A lot of it is basically some kind of conflict.

Participant 4 Response

Is there definitely bullying that goes on? Yes, but a lot of these parents aren't educated in saying, "My child's bullied." It's like, "No, your child made a comment to someone." I think we're almost in a way teaching about it too much where we're so hyper sensitive and everything has to be bullying. These kids come in and they're like, "I'm getting bullied." I'm like, "Oh my God, what happened?" "So and so just gave this eye roll at lunch." That's not bullying. It's frustrating.

Participant 2 Response

Maybe it's just provocation. Maybe you're just provoking this other kid. I think the principal is careful not to label this discipline right away as, "Okay, this is just a bullying situation." We make sure that when we're looking at the handbook, that it is, "Okay. Is it exactly what it is, or is it someone provoking another kid, or just disrespect to a fellow classmate? We're kind of careful to not, automatically, right away say, "Well, this is a bullying situation."

Participant 3 Response

I don't know if other people have expressed to you, but there are also a lot of things that get classified under bullying that are not. I feel like a lot of what I deal with is more how to be a good friend versus maybe bullying.

Participant 6 Response

I think that's the number one key to fighting bullying, is understanding that we are not talking about normal conflict. You have to understand, as an educator, the difference between normal conflict and bullying, and how to kindly and appropriately educate parents that they are not the same thing. We actually even talk about it at our orientation, in our open houses, because I think the parents knowing ahead of time. I do think, as an administrator or counselor, we can get frustrated hearing that word bullying all the time, on the radio. You're just like, "Come on guys." Then we can sit down with the parent, and we say that's not bullying.

This theme appeared in the analysis of the interviews with each of the six participants. They all stated that bullying does occur, but in their experience, not as often as one would think. However, when prompted to think about true instances of bullying, the participants did have incidents to share. The topic of gender difference in bullying activities with girls exhibiting more relational aggression and boys more physical also emerged during this portion of the interview as a common theme.

Participant 5 Response

I would say the majority of my time is spent with girls, mainly because it doesn't seem to be just one on one. Usually, it starts with, "Somebody's calling me names," or, "Somebody's saying this about me," or, "Somebody posted this

picture of me,” those kinds of things. Then, when you start digging a little bit deeper, there are multiple players in that game. Not to say that I haven't dealt with boy issues, but usually it seems like they're a little less complex. I'm not saying that they're not as severe to the person that they're happening to, but it seems like they can get over it faster, or there's a more concrete solution. Let's put it that way. That's a better way.

With the boys, it is more physical, physical aggression, those kinds of things. It's usually over and done with. They move on. That seems to be a lot more one on one. With girls, I think they do lack a lot of the maturity, because a lot of bullying is emotional and social in nature, so they really put so much emphasis on popularity, and who my friends are, what table I get to sit at, those kinds of things, that these things kind of chip away at their self-worth, and I think it does become a form of bullying. It is repetitive. The things that they do lack a lot of the social and mental and emotional maturity that comes along with dealing with that. Maybe that is what makes it worse. Maybe that is what makes these hurdles a little bit harder to get over for them, and the fact that they continuously need to talk about it, to anybody who will listen.

Participant 4 Response

I keep thinking in my head the definition of bullying. Something that's repeated over and over again, and these seem to be just students who don't know how to get along or they're just not nice. It's not that textbook, “Someone stole my lunch money.” It's not that classic bullying definition. It's all of this other mean girl type stuff. Boys will just get in a fight, beat each other up and it's done.

Additionally, all of the participants specified cyber bullying as a new form of bullying they are experiencing.

Participant 6 Response

The emergence in the last several years of cyber-bullying, has now taken over traditional bullying, especially at our level. I have cyber-bullying, it's still using exclusion, inappropriate pictures.

Participant 3 Response

Right now, I think the social media is a big thing that we deal with. I have to say that the principal has done a really good job, and even our school resource officer is saying that, you need not to bring it into school. We know kids have brought it to school; do you know what I mean? We try to deal with that by stating, "Okay, this is happening at home." When you ask the parents, "Is this happening at home?" you need to tell them, "If you bring it into school, there are consequences."

Those are things that we deal with a lot, and then cyber bullying. That's huge. It's everywhere. The emergence in the last several years of cyber-bullying, has now taken over traditional bullying, especially at our level. I have cyber-bullying, it's still using exclusion, inappropriate pictures.

As much as you tell the parents, "Don't let your kid on Facebook. Don't let your kid on Instagram." It's difficult for them, too. It puts them in a really hard spot because it is everywhere and that's kids' main line of communication a lot of the times. They're not calling each other on the phone anymore. They are texting, they are Snapchatting, they're doing all these things and they feel left out. It's like,

between a rock and a hard place. You want your kid to be social, but then you don't want them to get into all of these things.

Participant 1 Response

Mostly I get things like the harassment on social media, the Facebook stuff, text messaging, and kind of that relational aggression stuff with girls. That's mostly what I get in 7th and 8th grade is mostly with girls.

Participant 4 Response

There is a lack of communication skills, the coping skills. I think the communication skills are getting worse and worse because they're not communicating. They're not talking face to face; they're talking over a text and social media so you're losing a lot of the body language or the context or any of that. When they're in a situation where they're together and not on electronics, it's like they've lost the ability or maybe have at this age now have never learned the ability to read people, to know about social cues or things like that. We didn't have electronics so we actually talked to people and played with people and talked to people face to face but this generation, they're growing up without that and they're communicating electronically.

Participant 2 Response

Cyber bullying -When it spills over into the schools, that's huge. It always tends to as much as you'd like to think what is said outside of school will stay outside of school and it doesn't. It never does.

Although most participants replied that the majority of their experience is with conflict and cyber conflict, only 2 of the participants stated that they have had actual

experience with true bullying situations that were repeated and meant to take away power from another individual, and needed administrative involvement.

Participant 1 Response

The situation actually took place after the school day, but it took place on school property. That is when the school became involved. If it wouldn't have happened where it did, it actually happened on the elementary property, if that did not actually happen, we wouldn't have been involved in it. It would have been a complete outside situation. It was a situation where the student that did the bullying, there were two kids that harmed this child, that they were sent actually to alternative schools. Our district had placed them. The victim's family actually sought outside legal recourse against these other two students. In 19 years, that's been the biggest thing was that I've ever seen here. I'm actually not sure what happened because they were involved with the law and they had probation officers.

Participant 4 Response

I can remember a scenario of girls actually surrounded another girl and were taunting her. Actually they were starting to throw punches. I've seen it that bad. That's a seldom scenario, but I did have that issue.

Summary of Experiences with Bullying

Unexpectedly, only two of the six middle school counselors interviewed described experience with what they felt were considered to be true bullying situations. In both of these situations, the incidents were happening repeatedly to one student, by the same individual or individuals, and in doing so, were taking away that victim's power in

order to gain their own. Therefore, both were considered bullying by definition. One case resulted in alternative placement for the bully as well as police notification. In both situations, administration was involved in the incidents, not the counselors. However, the counselors were made aware of the situations in order to assist in monitoring the parties involved.

Two emerging themes materialized while examining the data to answer the first research question, specifically the experiences that middle school counselors have with bullying situations. The first theme was the counselors' belief that there is an increased need for students, parents and other stakeholders to have a clear understanding of what is bullying versus what is student conflict. All of the middle school counselors interviewed communicated the need for increased education with all stakeholders regarding what is true bullying and what is peer conflict. The participants all described instances where students come to them claiming occurrences of bullying when it is not. Often times making the determination takes some investigation and asking specific questions to gain further information regarding the incident, but when that is completed, the conclusion is disagreement and not bullying.

The second theme to emerge from this first research question is the impact of cyber bullying on middle school students. Once again, every participant talked about cyber bullying and how it affects students. The same types of behaviors such as exclusion, harassment, name calling, which have previously been expressed vocally, are now being done through online forums. The participants all described this new form of bullying as one from which students cannot escape and also one that they do not have the emotional maturity to handle.

Additionally, the counselors spoke of relational aggression (name calling and exclusion) being more common in female students, whereas physical aggression was more prevalent with males.

Overall, all counselors spoke at some length and gave multiple examples of their professional experience with bullying situations, albeit most were bullying situations which turned out to be peer conflict after further investigation or cyber bullying situations. This initial discussion led to the next research question which was examined, specifically, what theories of intervention have school counselors utilized with regards to the bully, victim, and bystander and how do these counselors determine which approach is most appropriate.

Summary of Findings of Research Question 2 – Philosophies of Intervention

The next set of questions were intended to gain insight as to how middle school counselors deal with bullying situations, what philosophy the counselor, in conjunction with the school, possesses regarding bullying and then how that philosophy impacts their choices for handling bullying situations. This was analyzed both with regards to methods which impact the entire school system and then specifically with the bully, the victim, and the bystander. The responses are outlined below as such.

When discussing philosophies of intervention, each participant discussed proactive approaches where the whole group of students is addressed. This occurs through assemblies, specific bully programs, small group intervention, and the individual counselor providing information to the students through classroom presentations. In one instance, the counselor provides a hybrid program for the teachers to present. Some

presentations are more specific, for example, as one counselor discussed, and geared toward cyber bullying.

Participant 4 Response

We do a lot of prevention programs with our kids that what you text, what you put out there, is for everyone to see. You have a footprint. These kids, because they're getting cellphones and they have access to all this stuff at so early an age, they don't know how to deal with it.

Another whole group program cited by one counselor is actually quite broad, not even mentioning the word bullying, but focusing more on treating one another with respect and what that looks like in real world scenarios.

Participant 2 Response

This year, we're going to a program. It's called Expect Respect. That's what we're going to and that's what we're focusing on. We're not really talking about, "Don't be a bully." We're saying, "Let's respect everybody." Respect yourself, respect your neighbor, how you treat each other, how you want to be treated.

This counselor also talked about the curriculum she is presenting in the classrooms herself. She geared her topics to what she deemed as necessary in her building, based on the information and experiences she has already gathered by the students, parents, and teachers.

Participant 2 Response

I'm actually going into classrooms. I am working on a PowerPoint for my 6th graders because I just started having some issues with them already. When I go in, I'm actually doing a combination talk. I do one; it's on social media. We do

cyber bullying and then I'm going to talk about respect. I'm going to cover all three topics. That's one of the things I start out with when we talk about social media, is you have a right to block somebody. Just because somebody is talking about you, they feel like they have to know what that person is saying. You don't need to know. Block them because if you don't hear it, then you're not going to get upset about it and they're not getting to you. They haven't figured that out yet. It's a tough age.

This same participant also views a school duty as an opportunity for intervention and prevention on a large scale and is described below.

Participant 2 Response

I know a lot of guidance counselors, they tell you, "You shouldn't be in the cafeteria. That shouldn't be a job for you. You should not be a monitor because that's taking you away from the kids." Well my philosophy is different. About three or four years ago, we moved the 6th grade up here. What I was seeing was after lunch, there was a lot of issues. I asked if I could be a lunch monitor for the 6th grade. My goal every year, and this is my 3rd or 4th year doing it is to get to know every single student. I get to know who they're with. I get to see where they sit. Are they a loner? They know my rule is I don't like them sitting by themselves. You have to really be telling me that you are that independent, that you want to be by yourself. Otherwise, we're hooking you up with somebody. I've done a lot of problem solving and a lot of relationship stuff, just in the cafeteria. It cut down on all of that coming back from lunch. The whole cafeteria thing, it was just a thought at first, "Oh, should I go down to the cafeteria?" Then I thought,

"You know what? I used to pull kids out of the cafeteria. They would have to sign up to see me. I used to bounce between elementary school and the middle school. Our 6th grade was actually with elementary school. For three years until they came up here, I would go there. Every day, I would go down and I would have slips of paper. They could sign up. They all wanted to sign up to come with me. I was excited about it because I got to know the kids really well. Then I would actually go in the class. We had time at the end of the day. I would go in and we would have talks. I would sit on the floor and I'd say, "What's going on today? What are the issues?" The kids would be really open about who was doing what. We would talk about it in a non-threatening way. When the kids moved up here, I lost that time.

The Olweus Program of Bully Prevention was another whole group program used by a middle school, and also district-wide. Their theory and practice of bully prevention is implemented with the whole group of students, but in a smaller group method of interaction.

Participant 3 Response

We use the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. We've been with it, and I would love to tell you the exact number of years. I'm trying to think, I think this is our sixth or seventh year. It's Kindergarten through 12th grade. They all do the classroom meetings. They look differently at each grade, of course, but they all do the classroom meetings and make it fit. There are classroom meetings. We do them here every Tuesday during homeroom for twenty minutes. We're starting something a little different this year than what we've done in the past. In the past,

the homeroom teacher has had a buddy come down and they've run it together with their twenty-five to twenty-seven kids, however many are in the homeroom. This year, the principal has decided, in talking with me and a bunch of other people, that smaller groups might be better and get them talking a little bit more. We're going to have the buddies, including all of our administration and the counselors, take a homeroom and we're splitting them in half so they'll only have ten, twelve, or fifteen kids, or however many that ends up being.

This middle school also incorporates the use of data gathered from surveys, which are part of the Olweus Program, to make changes in their building, and the school counselor is a part of the process in deciding where change needs to be made.

Participant 3 Response

The principal and all of the counselors look at all of the past years' results from the surveys, both from the kids and the teachers, and we take a look at the hot spots. We take a look at what behavior has been seen and let the staff know where it's been happening and then again what we're doing as an administration and a guidance department to combat it. We have added different cameras in locations where hot spots have become more prevalent. We've added more staff, the hall duties, depending on where those are happening.

In addition to the Olweus Program, this middle school has coupled it with an online anonymous reporting system, giving additional useful data to the counselor and administration in the building. The participant discusses it below.

Participant 3 Response

We have seen through using the Olweus program and also then coupled with Sprigeo reporting. Sprigeo has been excellent for the whole district, by empowering those bystanders, I think. This has been a great tool for that because they can be anonymous if they want to, but a lot of them choose not to be. They want us to know that they did report it and it was from one of their friends being bullied or whatever it is, maybe even just someone in the hallway. That's another great thing about Sprigeo is it allows us to track all of this and see if that name has come up a repeated amount of times as well as locations. I would notice like, "Oh, I might need extra supervision in this part of the building after lunch" or something. If you use everything that it has to offer, it's an amazing program. It really is. Then we tend to cross-reference that with nurse reports as well, especially if there has been a victim whose name has come up a couple times who has been seen in the nurse's office with a stomachache or a headache or an avoidance of a certain class period. We also cross reference staff reports as well and attendance. We look at all of those things.

One other participant stated that they also use the Sprigeo reporting website combined with a school-wide positive behavior support program as a means of students, parents, and anyone else who has information that is important for the school system to be made aware, to anonymously make a report.

Participant 4 Response

We have Sprigeo, which is the online reporting system that kids can go on or parents or anybody, and report things anonymously if they choose to. We have

the school wide positive behavior support program that they do. There's things in there about promoting a positive school culture so I think some of those things even though they're not directly anti-bullying, we're trying to have a more part of the school culture. We give out tickets if we see a student helping somebody else. Using students to promote a positive school culture instead of focusing directly on the topic of bullying was also discussed as another means of promoting positivity and respect.

Participant 2 Response

Another thing that I do is I started about seven years ago is ambassadors. They're called Red and Yellow Ambassadors. I started it because I was getting this influx of new students. How do I help them to integrate into the school? Well then I thought to myself, "I don't want these kids to just be ambassadors for the new students. I want them to be ambassadors of the school." Our motto is not just being nice to new kids, but helping all kids. We do a lot of talking about how do you treat other people? Asking for those kids to be the ones that step up when there's an issue. If you notice that somebody is having a difficult time and they're not sitting with somebody, that maybe you go over and you ask them to join your table. That has also been a really positive thing. The kids want to be an ambassador. They have to do an application and things like that.

The following participant developed a multi-source program that works for her school. It combines Olweus, a curriculum entitled, *Bully Proofing Your School, A Comprehensive Approach for Middle Schools* by Marla Bonds and Sally Stoker, and also digital citizenship training provided by Common Sense Media.

Participant 6 Response

The one component that I did like about Olweus is that it added the staff. This is the expectation to follow when you are observing or addressing a bullying situation. It is a hugely comprehensive program, but even hearing that, it's pretty difficult to pull off. Even if you train one year you have new bus drivers and you have other new staff. It's either a directive from your district administrators, we are going to make this five-year initiative to make Olweus our number one priority, or you're going to tweak it to work for your school. The first year we did the once a week meetings as always. What happens is the academics will cycle into the higher priority, so that we have more time for reading and math. Right now we continue to do a once a month. What that really is, is an activity period if you will, but it's not an hour. It's 40 minutes. With the concept of "everybody has to do this". Now, we don't include the lunch ladies and that kind of stuff, or the bus drivers at that point, but all staff. Your specials, your homeroom, everybody has to have a group. We do it once a month and we rotate it between the beginning and the end of the day. That is something that as a counselor in getting to know your school you can then design a program that's going to meet with little resistance. What I did was I scripted the whole thing. I created a binder for every teacher. Each one of the eighth grade teachers got one of these; so did the seventh grade, sixth grade. I do have the outlines in this folder for you. There's no prep, if you know what I mean. There is no prep; it's just following a script. There is everything that you need. These lessons are a combination of the bully-proofing purple book, Olweus, and then, one thing I did not put on there is, I use a couple

of things from that company called HRM, Human Resources Materials. It comes with the binders and the DVDs. That's a good resource, too, for that. Like I said, I created it. Every teacher got one of these. Now, in the meantime I'm going to turn the wheel one more time. We had this, then we had Olweus, and then last year we integrated because we are one-to-one with technology. This, I think, is going to be a really good resource for you if you haven't checked it out yet. We're now doing a combination of bully proofing, which we just call bully proofing now. We do not call it Olweus anymore. We just call it Bully Proofing. Bully Proofing, I integrated into the eighth grade, was more of an advisory, the concept of middle school. Your advisory is more academic focused, so it's checking your grades, checking in with your group. There are all kinds of things out there. Now, we currently have a combination of Bully Proofing and something called Digital Citizenship, which focuses on cyber safety.

This counselor goes on to describe how the method of intervention then impacts in what way individual cases are then handled.

Participant 6 Response

What I always do, even with the kid, is lead it into, what happened matters because it matters the approach that we are going to take to address it, because either one we're addressing. Either one, we're going to work at this together, but it's important to know which one it is because they're handled two very different ways. Kind of explaining it that way. Let me assure you, regardless of whether it's bullying or conflict or I want to fight my best friend, we're still going to help you but we need to know what avenue, or what path, we're going to take first.

What's the next step? The Bully Proofing curriculum actually has a chart that explains the difference between friendly teasing and bullying, normal conflict and bullying. Going back to the core of establishing any bully-proofing program throughout your school, we call it a systematic approach, is the common language. You know what bullying is, I know what bullying is. I know what a bully is, a victim, and a bystander. We all know what these things are, so when we're talking about it we don't necessarily need to pause and explain the word as much as we can use them as a tool.

Philosophies and methods of intervention differ from school to school. Every counselor who participated talked about some type of whole group prevention taking place, however, three participants have a formalized program in place and three do not. Olweus is only being used in one middle school exclusively out of the six, and another is using it, but in conjunction with other programs. An anonymous reporting website is being used by half of the middle schools who participated. All have described hosting assemblies, positive behavior programs, or student leadership programs as a means of impacting the students on a large scale. These methods of intervention and prevention are meant for all students, and not specifically for the bully, victim, or bystander. What follows is the participants described methods of intervention used specifically for the bully or aggressor in bullying situations.

When asked about interventions for the bully, two counselors described disciplinary steps that are taken by administration.

Participant 1 Response

For example, for the first offense you get Saturday detention, the student must meet with a counselor, parents are involved. The student receives a written notice further incidents will result in a harassment citation. That was just the first offense. Let's see, second offense is three days of OSS [Out of School Suspension] and a citation, and will not be permitted to return to school unless accompanied by a parent. Third offense is five days of OSS, a citation, students and parents must meet with the superintendent and the principal to discuss possible placement in an alternative education.

This participant also discusses additional intervention strategies for the bully.

Participant 1 Response

I think one is education. Helping them, the support, whether we support this kid through student assistance program or maybe a trusted teacher that has this kid, making sure that those kids have resources available to them. Also, parent involvement. I'm a big proponent of that; you have to have parental support. If you don't have that, and I'm not saying that we get it, because we don't get it a lot. At least we're able to help them that way. "Here's the resources for you." "Do you need to see the social worker?" "What things can I set up for you so this does not happen again?"

Another participant discussed a combination of communication and discipline as a method of intervention with the bully.

Participant 3 Response

That kind of depends on the situation, too. Some of them respond best with consequences and that phone call home. You'd be surprised at how much just one single phone call home will change the behavior of a kid when their parents are on them and know what's happening. We have the lunch detention that we can give them. We have after school detention if it becomes more of an issue.

Sometimes separating the kids and looking at their schedules and if it's happening during class.

Participants also discussed when reports of bullying move from a counseling level to an administrative level, when the intervention with the bully moves from the counselor to the principal and the consequences and actions of that person.

Participant 2 Response

If there's any type of threat that there's going to be a physical altercation or something like that, I almost always tell the principal or assistant principal about it, or if it's become to the point that, you know, I'm seeing these kids every day for a week, or multiple times a day, or if I feel like this is going to continue. I almost always just give them a heads up if this is an ongoing situation, but if there's discipline involved, definitely. We've had to remove somebody from lunch, so that's not necessarily my call, but say, "Hey, this is where this is all happening. They're torturing this person during lunch." Then, they get yanked, and lunch detention for a week.

Participant 3 Response

Let's say the student comes in, it's a victim, and they're telling me about a bullying situation. Get the information from them; figure out what's happening. I support the victim. Our Dean of Students, he's the one who takes care of the bully. I give him the report; give him all of the information, then he pulls so that I'm not the person who is doing the discipline. We don't want to cross those paths; because then the lines get blurry. The Dean would confront the bully; find out more about the situation. Sometimes he finds out that it goes both ways and then he's got to deal with both kids. A lot of the times he finds out that it was just that kid bullying the victim and then he will impose consequences from there. If it were a repeated offense, he would then call home. Usually on the first time, we don't just because we're waiting to see.

The other participants looked at intervention from more of a social/ emotional viewpoint, wanting to get to the root cause of why a bully is behaving in an aggressive manner and then taking steps to teach replacement skills and provide support.

Participant 4 Response

I think some bullies do bully because they've been bullied, also. They want to turn the tables and make themselves feel stronger. Getting them to remember what it was like when they were sometimes helps, but then it sometimes can backfire too because they don't ever want to go back to that spot.

Participant 5 Response

If the bully is doing something [wrong] and there's a discipline issue [that would be handled by the principal] so besides that, which is obviously not my piece,

[I would] probably [work on] finding out why they're doing what they're doing. I don't think most kids are just bad. I don't think they start out wanting to beat somebody up or have the behaviors that they're having. Finding out what is driving that behavior. What are they thinking? What's going on with them? What are they lacking that they need to fulfill them? Obviously they're doing these things to fulfill some type of need for power or control something like that. Working with them to find out why they're doing what they're doing and maybe directing them to mental health services or family counseling or things like that.

Participant 2 Response

Well, talking to them, explaining to them. Sometimes I ask them, "Why are you really doing this? Do you understand how uncomfortable you're making them feel?" A lot of times, these kids have been bullied themselves, so I think what really works for especially a middle school kid is to be like, "Tell me about a time where you were bullied." A lot of them know me because they have been bullied, and I'll say to them, "I can remember a time where you sat in this exact same chair crying, because this person made you feel like this. Now you're going to do it to them? Why?" They almost need to be reminded of that. Sometimes, it's because they're so mad that somebody else has done it to them, that they've tried to make somebody else feel the way they have felt. It's all about power. Just kind of trying to put them in that other person's place seems to help.

Participant 6 Response

You definitely need the parent support, especially if it has to do with social media. There will be even times, like this situation that I was explaining here, I called the

parent of the bully before I talked to the kid just to kind of say, "This is what's going on, would you like me to talk to your daughter?" that type of thing.

Proactively saying I'm here to help. That's to answer your question. It just might be because I'm fortunate because my kids are very well behaved. It's workable.

The bully is just as hurt. Maybe not just as hurt, but they are hurt, too. If you can find the reason behind it, like one of the things that I said about the bully is,

what's the function? Why are they doing it? What's the function of their

behavior? If you can, open that conversation. Now, obviously some situations are way more intense than you can solve in one or two school counseling sessions.

Like I said, the majority of them are, though. Then explain it. It is a little bit different than middle school and high school. To explain, this is why they're mad.

This is what you did. This is why they're mad at you and they're acting this way.

On the majority of them is that they learn how to find an outlet for their emotion in a different way. Say it's like a humor, like an offensive humor for example.

Finding another outlet for that.

This participant further explains why she chooses to use the word bully carefully when dealing with parents.

Participant 6 Response

I've seen people use that word and it is an instant trigger. It definitely has emotion attached to it. You use the word conflict, or an issue, as opposed to a problem. Or there was a situation that I wanted to follow up with you on. There are definitely words that are more appropriate to use with a parent.

When asked about intervention and prevention specifically, half of the participants discussed their school's policies for bullying behaviors and also how a report may move from counselor intervention to administrative involvement, and the other participants talked about the need for parental involvement and notification. In addition to discussing disciplinary measures taken to combat bullying, multiple participants chose to intervene to determine the root cause of the behavior, whether it was to gain power over the other person, to make a person feel how they have felt in the past, or to find another outlet for their behavior. They feel that understanding the root cause of the bullying behavior can lead to the student having more social success and less aggressive behaviors.

Moving on from the bully to the victim, the participants were asked a series of questions to determine what methods of intervention and prevention they have chose to use in the past and what they have found to be most successful.

Participant 1 Response

With the victims, in true, true, cases of bullying, and I mean severe bullying that we had probably three or four years ago, we recommended outside counseling to the families, because it was such a severe, traumatic case for that child, something like that. Basically, if it's something [that a bully does that we consider] little then we're looking here at this [school bullying] policy, and if it's something big that's outside, that's a legal situation, I work on coping skills with the kids. I'm like, "What are things that you can do or can't do in this situation?" How could, your reaction change things? This also has a lot to do with self-esteem and how they

perceive things. Sometimes, in this culture, it seems like we have a victim mentality. I try to work with kids through those types of things.

Participant 2 Response

If you come down, and you say so-and-so is bothering you, we take a look at it, we see what's going on. I always ask kids that "Are you interested in doing conflict resolution, or doing a peer mediation?" because I feel that that works best, because kids don't know how to talk it out. They really don't. The same thing works with the victim as well. These are the steps that we're going to take to make this, and helping you with the learning experience and that they grow. A lot of, sometimes you see, I don't know. Sometimes, for me, at the middle school level, it is a maturity thing. At least what I think, our middle school and high school were connected until they built the new school last year, so, I was able to see the kids I worked with in middle school. This kid that was bullied severely, the victim, when he went to high school, he didn't have one issue. I think he's graduating this year or next. I'm being honest with you. The mom didn't call every day. We had weekly phone calls with the mother in middle school; making sure things were going okay. You know, sometimes I think that kids mature. Those kids went two different paths. I think, for me, it's like having a plan with them, even like little checklists, a simple way that, for coping skills. "Okay, say this happens. What can you do over on this side? What are some things?" Checking in with them, not smothering them. I think kids, if you can, as a counselor, in my opinion, it's like, I don't over-counsel you or over-check-in on you. I try to do a

balance like, what works for you? Let's do a schedule together, and even just checking in with the parents as well.

Participant 3 Response

Victims, that's where the counselors come in. Those are the ones that we tend to meet with usually first once we get the report. Now whether the report comes in from the bystander or from the victim, we tend to meet with the victim to get the story and support them and let them know that if it continues, we want to be aware of it and not just continue to take it on themselves. That way we can take further precautions and we have the bully get further consequences as well. Yeah. If that needs to happen, you got to protect that victim. Making the teachers aware so they're more vigilant of putting these two kids next to each other or putting them in a group together, just a constant watch. I think the kids try and get away with it, especially when they think the teachers aren't looking. I really leave it up to the victim. Sometimes I even ask them right off the bat, "Do you want me to turn this over to the Dean of Students?" Sometimes they say no, because they are afraid that it's going to get bigger. I always let the parents know that this is what your child decided, so please have a conversation with them at home. If anything changes, let me know, but it really depends on what they want. I don't want to step outside of their comfort zone. It should not be happening. I do drill those things home with them, but sometimes it takes a couple times in order for them to actually get it and to have a group of friends that they feel comfortable with, that they feel supported by, so helping them find those through our friendship groups here for girls and boys. Social groups. We have a group of kids. Some of them

sign up voluntarily, others are recommended by teachers. We pull them in during homeroom and we just talk just about anything, girl issues, and then the guys talk about sports and things like that. Just to get them learning how to make friends and how to be social because some of them don't understand how to even go about making a friend, so we do start with that.

Participant 4 Response

I think reassuring them that I heard you. I will support you. I'm going to handle this. We're going to do everything we can to not let it happen again. Sometimes that means changing a locker or a schedule or some things like that but basically just checking in with them even after it happens. Creating that relationship like I am here for you so if something happens you can report this. Often times reassuring them that there won't be retaliation since it's been reported or if they reported it.

Participant 5 Response

I've given them a little bit of time to talk about it, but after that, I'm more so, "We have to be more focused on a solution." This last incident, these two girls were like, "Well, you're going to have to call my mom and tell them that you're making me be friends." I said, "No, no, no. I'm not making you be friends. What I'm making you do is try to stay away from each other, or respect each other's space, or just co-exist. You don't have to be friends." We can't go over this every single day, when they're supposed to be in school. Give them strategies. Listen to them. Get as many people involved as you can, like administration, the teachers, a buddy. Sometimes we'll write passes for them to leave early. I don't necessarily

like to do that so much, because they're going to have to deal with it at some point, and you don't want to make them look like they're so weak they can't be in the halls with everybody else. I mean, if that alleviates their anxiety, then I'll definitely do it. I've had kids this year come and ask me to change their classes right off the bat, and if it's something that I didn't know about that happened in elementary school, and I think it's going to be long-term, sure. I'll change your schedule. Let's get rid of that right away.

Participant 6 Response

Bullying by definition is repeated or ongoing. To answer that specific question, one of the first things I look at when talking to the victim is, are you friends at the moment? I will even ask that, "Are you friends? Did you go to the same elementary school?" Kind of getting a background. I have had someone in here and I need to get a background of the bully and a background of the victim. Often times, yes, they're friends. They were best friends yesterday. This is a totally different situation. Also included in the definition of bullying is the intent. Is your intent to hurt somebody or harm somebody? Or was it honestly because you don't know or they made you mad? What was your intention? Just a comment on that to you, as a counselor's perspective, what I've learned is how to have the conversation with middle school students because what the sense of humor is. Then that leads into the exploration of the difference between funny and offensive. You have to look for non-verbals, tone of voice, because middle school students don't know this. In counseling, you do something like, "What happened?" It's hard to answer that question because of the relationships and all

that, they kind of just tell me. If I'm determining how am I going to handle this? Am I going to do conflict resolution? Or am I going to treat this like a true bullying situation? Let's say, a situation that I'm dealing with currently. A girl comes in to my office; there has been harassment on social media. It's trickling into school. Whether or not we want to say that we deal with social media or not it's ok, just admit that we do. At this point you have to deal with it. They were friends; they made friends with someone on the Internet. Now you're talking cyber safety, which is one step further than cyber bullying. They got mad at each other; so they were talking badly, screen shot what was being said. Once they made up, sent it to the girl. Now she can see everything that she said, and there is this ongoing, escalating situation between these two girls, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. The one girl is now claiming that she's not doing anything. Now, as we know with cyber-bullying we talk about reporting, blocking, and those types of things. I think that's one of the real good things about this Common Sense Digital Citizenship, it has a realistic point of view. Kids aren't going to do that. Kids are not going to block someone that's posting all of these mean things about them because they want to be able to defend themselves. What it ends up being is back and forth. At the time she said she wasn't doing anything. This girl was just being mean to her. It trickled into school because now we have mean looks and you're now involving other students. This girl created a roast and showed other kids, so now the other kids in school are coming up to her saying, "I know, I saw. In this case that's bullying. They are not brought together to work this out. I do talk to the girls about it. I talk to the kids about it and say, "These are

the different approaches that we want to look at", and I get an idea of what they want. I guide them through that question. "What do you want?" There's usually one or two. It's either, "I want it to stop", or there's the phrase that I have now used is there's a curiosity. They want to know why. Those are two very different things, and I explain that to kids. Those are two different things because if you're looking for an answer and you're looking for a why, that's a conversation. If you're just looking to stop you have a choice in your behaviors. You're not looking for someone else to give you a response or to tell you, they're looking for anything from that other person.

One of the things that I think is really hard, not just for kids but also for parents, whomever, from a counselor's point of view, we work with the kid. Whether it's the bully, the victim, or the bystander, I'm going to focus on you and what you can do. We talk about the different strategies at our fingertips; it's kind of like a roadmap. I explain that not everybody deals with it in the same way. Middle school is a learning time. You have to learn what's best for you. How I deal with it, how mom deals with it, isn't necessarily what you're going to feel comfortable doing.

You judge that comfort level. Is this child mature enough to start talking about assertiveness? Assertive training is one of the things that we've learnt does work and it's something that we can teach to deal with bullies. Is it something where they're just asking for an adult intervention? Or are they just asking for adult help? Actually I should say, those are two different things. Do they just need to run it past an adult and talk to, or are they actually looking for you to do

something? As a middle school person you know that that can be two different. Sometimes they want you to do nothing. They are mortified if you or mom does anything. They just want to have some safe place and safe person to talk to. Which is fine to the point of threatening and hurt. The bully can't threaten you, they, can't hurt you. Once that happens, sorry, games over, we go to an administrator.

Overall, the participants' methods of intervention with the victim were similar. Taking to them, allowing them to share their feelings, and giving the victims tools and strategies for when they are faced with an aggressive situation. Additionally, they discussed allowing the victim to make the decision as to where to go after the situation has been reported. If it is not a situation where threats are being made, or the intent to harm someone is there, allowing that victim to make the choice of telling an administrator, participating in a conflict resolution session, or perhaps nothing at all, empowers the victim and allows them to make the decision that best suits their needs.

The bully-victim is a new participant in bully situations, but was mentioned by one participant.

Participant 2 Response

What I see a lot with the victims, and you may have seen this with some of the kids, it's not okay that they are victims, but they put themselves in the situation of being the victim. It's more of a social skills thing. What did you do in this situation that maybe the kids were upset with you? It's not okay that they treated this way, but what can we do to change it?

According to this participant, the bully-victim struggles with social situations, and although still victimized by bullying behaviors directed toward him or her, it is the direct result of the victim acting out toward the bully initially.

Bystanders are the third party in acts of aggression, and the participants described how they become an important part of prevention and intervention strategies. The need for support to these students was discussed multiple times, and also the ability to empower these bystanders can make an overall difference in the climate of a building.

Philosophies of Intervention for the Bystander

Participant 5 Response

I talk to the bystanders a lot. They really become the third player, by not sticking up for them, or fueling the fire. Last year, we had a physical fight between two girls, and when I ended up digging a little bit deeper again, found out that half the middle school was out there with their phones out waiting for this to happen.

They're recording it. I was furious. We ended up having a meeting in the auditorium after that, because I was so hurt that they would do this to one of their peers, to allow this to happen and not tell me. I was like, "You guys want this place to change? The things I hear most, 'I hate this school. I hate this school. I hate this school.' You're the ones that set the tone for the whole school. How can you continue to treat each other like this, and record when your peer is getting hurt, physically hurt, and not put your phone down and help that person? That's the problem." Right now, even, I'm just talking about this, and I'm getting goose bumps. I don't know. That was so bothersome to me, to think that I'm not just talking about one or two. There were, thirty kids that had this on their phone. To

think that nobody had enough guts to tell an adult blows my mind. Again, they want that piece of information on their phone to share this with so many people, which becomes more important to them than helping somebody. In the world of selfies, nobody believes anything unless they can see it. "I was there. I saw this. This really did happen."

Just keep educating them to try to get help, to tell an adult, to tell a parent. I have had parents call me who are unattached to a situation and have told me, "Hey, this is going on. Don't use my name." I've found out about things from parents. I guess the best way would be just to keep educating them, saying, "This is important." That they matter too, that they can make a difference, even by just telling an adult, hopefully. We don't know a lot of this stuff that's going on, especially on these social media sites.

Reassuring the bystander that their report will stay anonymous is very important to some bystander as the previous participant reported. However, the following participants talk about empowering the bystanders and helping them gain pride reporting aggression and making the school a safe place to learn.

Participant 3 Response

The bystander, that's something that the Olweus program is all kind of centered around. Empowering the bystander is huge. Those are the people that we're getting the reports from. We have seen through using the Olweus program and also then coupled with Sprigeo reporting. It is an amazing program. That is an awesome way for our bystanders to feel empowered. Sprigeo has been excellent for the whole district, so empowering those bystanders, I think. This has been a

great tool for that because they can be anonymous if they want to, but a lot of them choose not to be. They want us to know that they did report it and it was from one of their friends being bullied or whatever it is, maybe even just someone in the hallway.

Participant 2 Response

I've had a couple kids report at my lunch table so and so is being mean to so and so or something like that and the first thing I do is thank them for doing the right thing. This is exactly what we teach you to do; this is exactly what you're supposed to be doing. You're helping this person out. You could even be helping other people out by reporting this bully because if you didn't they'd probably go on to maybe bully somebody else. Thanking them for that because that's acknowledging that that's not always an easy thing to do because they're often afraid of retaliation or please don't use my name or we have to get creative about how we found out. Also I guess just reassuring them that it will be taken care of because I think that makes kids nervous when they do see that and they don't always think this is happening in a place where principals or teachers aren't seeing it and they think maybe it's going to keep going on and it's not going to be taken care of.

Participant 6 Response

I think that is the key factor in making your school a safer place to be. The power lies with the bystander, and all the research proves that. Even in this one. I'm sure the percentages have changed a little bit; 5% bully, 10% victim, 85% of your population is a bystander. There is power in numbers. It is a key factor in teaching

the kids to stand up for one another. Stand up for when they see something going on. Let somebody know. Let's talk about how you deal with it in a non-aggressive way, because I think that's key, too. Those strategies that work for victims also work for bystanders, too. What I've learned, and this is not just regarding kids. The reason most people stand by when something has happened is fear. They don't want to get involved because they don't want to bring on that hatred towards them. It's still about building confidence, building kindness. Then in this one in particular the word, when you're teaching and realizing that they're not necessarily born that way, is empathy. Empathy, assertiveness, those things become kind of a guide to understanding that not everybody knows how to feel empathy, or show empathy, but just how important that that is. Removing the fear for bystanders. Them trusting you if they did come down or their parent called them. Trusting that you're not going to give their name. Trusting that you're not going to bring them into this. No matter how the situation plays out you're not going to say, "Well, come on down here because you saw this." They're very similar to me as the victim, is that they learn ways that works for them. That they can stand up and, I think for them is, to feel proud. To feel that sense of pride that you only feel when you've done something that was really hard but you did it anyway, and it was the right thing to do. Taking that with you. Taking that sense of, "You know, sometimes the right thing is the hard thing to do but I'm going to build and build. As I move throughout my life I'm going to use that to become the greatest person that I can be."

Only one participant responded that little interaction has happened with the bystanders.

Participant 1 Response

I'll be honest with you. I really haven't dealt with that much.

An emerging theme that arose from this section of the interview when discussing theories of intervention was the impact that supportive administration has on the counselor, and the importance of a positive relationship between the principal and counselor. Three of the participants talked about this when discussing interventions.

Participant 1 Response

The first thing that came to my mind is that I think that working in a school, you have to have support of your administration. If you don't, the whole thing collapses. I'm thinking about if I came to the principal and said, "Hey, I believe that we have a bullying situation." and he'd be like, "Well, it's not a big deal. Just let it go." I think that would be really hard for my job. I do. We're on the same page. It makes both of our jobs a lot easier that, he knows if I'm going to come to him and say, "Well, such and such is happening." He knows that, "Oh, okay. I've already met with him. I already did XYZ." He would be like, "Okay." He knows I'm serious. If you have an administrator blowing you off or brushing it under the rug, or saying that, "Oh, we don't have bullying here." I think you have problems.

Participant 2 Response

Our assistant principal handles the discipline. This is her 2nd year with us. We've had other ones before. I've had the best relationships with the principals. I haven't had one bad relationship. They know I pretty much try to handle things on my

own. When I go to them and say, "Look, I think this needs to happen," then it's taken to the next level. Then the assistant principal and I will do things together, too. Yesterday we sat with a boy who was having a hard time. I was having a hard time getting him to explain what was going on. I don't know if he was struggling with the words or if he was afraid to tell us, but then once she was there, he opened up about what was going on. Now she's investigating because it really seems to be a bullying situation and she's taking it from there. I would say that the partnership between school counselor and administrator is definitely a key point. You have to know when it's out of your hands, but to have that relationship with somebody that you can go to them and say, "Look, I need you to understand that if I'm asking you, it's because I need your help."

Participant 4 Response

I think they know that we try to handle whatever we can back here and then this outright especially with this threat of the physical violence. We take that right to the principals because that's just a lot more risk there. Even if they happen to get a case or report of bullying over Sprigeo that goes right to the principal so they will sometimes shoot that back to us if it's something that these girls are just having an issue, why don't you pull one in, get more of the story, find out what's happening and handling it at this level first. We toss the ball where it needs to be tossed and as appropriately as it should be. Everyone does a good job at his or her role. It is nice when you have that relationship and we're both behind the scenes. I think that is really important. That really I think would make or break this position if like you said, if you had a principal who didn't have your back or it would make this really

hard. We all work together. There are three principals and there are three counselors so it's a very comfortable. We're not intimidated; we can go into their offices and consult. The students have relationships with them, but they're different than my relationship with them. Our principals do a lot of counseling too. In hallways or maybe at lunch they pull someone aside. Parents sometimes call the assistant principal or they call the principal, maybe they call the other principal so we all need to chip in and have what our piece is to come up with that full picture.

Summary of Philosophies of Intervention

When talking to the participants about philosophies of intervention, the data were analyzed and then grouped into whole school intervention and prevention strategies, strategies for the bully, strategies for the victim, strategies for the bully-victim, and strategies for the bystander. Disciplinary interventions according to the student handbook were discussed, along with when the situation needs to move from a counselor to an administrator. Whole group intervention strategies discussed included assemblies, programs such as Olweus and Bully Proofing, small group instruction; specific curriculum delivered by the classroom teachers, and classroom presentations given by the school counselor. Some of the interventions are focused on eliminating bullying and cyber bullying specifically where others are broad and discuss respectful behavior for all students and over digital citizenship when using the Internet. Additionally, an emerging theme was the need for the administrator to support and trust the counselor and the importance of that counselor/ administrator relationship. However, a common theme was

that all participants spoke of some type of prevention strategy being implemented in their school.

Olweus is being used in two schools, one participant stated that it was met with great success, and was a district-wide initiative that was completed K-12. The other participant used a combination of Olweus, Bully Proofing, and Digital Citizenship in a custom-made curriculum designed for teachers to use with small groups. The other participants did not have bully prevention programs, although two used an anonymous online reporting system that was given positive reviews, and another was just beginning a program called Expect Respect. The other two participants did not have a specific program, but still used prevention strategies such as assemblies and presentations to impact the students as a whole.

Intervention and prevention strategies for the bully varied. Two participants discussed the school's discipline policies, describing what occurs when a child has acted aggressively toward another child. Working to understand the root cause of why a child is bullying was viewed as important by four of the participants. In examining the more social and emotional causes for bullying, their methods of intervention included parental involvement and resources such as counseling for the child and perhaps even the family. One participant shared her belief that students who act out in an aggressive manner have sometimes been recipients of bullying behaviors themselves and therefore are trying to make others feel how they felt when they were victims of aggression. Another participant, as a way to cause the behavior to stop or change to something more appropriate, mentioned helping the students find an alternative outlet for their behavior.

When examining victims of true bullying situations, two counselors recommended counseling services be offered to the student. The participants also meet with the victims to work with coping skills and increasing the victim's self-esteem. Additionally, counselors facilitate sessions of peer conflict resolution and peer mediation as intervention techniques. One participant offers assertive training, but only if the student is willing and has the maturity to understand the implication of assertion. Counselors stated that allowing the victim to make the decision as to the intervention technique he or she is most comfortable with builds the trust and allows the victim to have a safe place to allow the counselor to intervene or simply have a safe place to talk.

Also with regards to the victim, the bully- victim was discussed by one of the participants. A perceived lack of social skills was discussed as a reason behind this person's inability to get along with his or her peers and offering social skills training as a form of prevention was deemed as worthy of implementing.

The bystander was the third group in the bullying triad that school counselors discussed, and their impact on prevention and intervention is crucial to the overall reduction of bullying episodes. One participant stated that bystanders fear retaliation and that the need to eliminate that fear will lead to an increase in the bystanders standing up to the bully. Multiple participants detailed the need for increased and continuous education is necessary for the bystanders to understand the importance of their role. Furthermore building that level of trust between counselor and bystander was reported as necessary for the bystanders to feel secure enough to make the reports, as is acknowledging their bravery in reporting and reassuring them that they will be safe. The participant from the middle school that uses the Olweus system stated that the curriculum

is meant to empower the bystander. Additionally, the Sprigeo reporting system used by multiple schools was reported to be very successful because it is anonymous.

Summary of Findings of Research Question 3 – Training and Impact of Intervention Strategies

The final set of questions was queried in order to gain insight into the training and professional development that the counselors have received, specifically with bully prevention and intervention. The trainings were then further examined by the participants according to the impact they have had on students. The details of the participants' responses were then analyzed and are listed below.

Multiple participants did discuss attending any formal conferences or training regarding bullying specifically. This participant, however, sought assistance from colleagues who are familiar with the students.

Participant 5 Response

For me, I think it must have been just through experience, and really getting to know whom I'm dealing with. These seventh graders are brand new, so a lot of times something that's worked with somebody isn't going to work with this new person. It's kind of just getting to know who they are. I call the elementary counselor a lot, and just kind of pick her brain. We have a new assistant principal up here this year from the elementary, so he's actually been a really good resource because he knows the kids. Certain things that I wouldn't even think about asking, like he's come in here and said, "You know what? She hangs out at the playground." I'm like, "Oh. That changes things." He's been able to give me a lot more background information that I would never have thought of asking. That's

been a really valuable resource. I went to that one Mean Girls presentation five years ago. That's the last thing I went to.

Financial impacts on school districts have made attending trainings and conferences outside of the district not possible for this participant.

Participant 4 Response

I have not been to any and really have only seen a couple offered on bully prevention, like the relational aggression. I was really interested in going to something like that but they all cost money. I think the training piece was a good question. We talk about it so much and it's such a problem but we don't like I said, maybe I'm just not aware of them because we don't really go many places outside here.

This participant seeks the opportunities herself, and the district is supportive in her attending these meetings and conferences. She also keeps abreast of current topics in her field through local news sources.

Participant 1 Response

I've been to some; I try to keep up every year with going to professional development opportunities. The STAR conference is great. They have it in Pittsburgh. They have it in the spring. That's a good program. The school counselor conference also has training as well. The School Counselors Association, they have some, last year they had some training and stuff like that. The district is very supportive with sending us to professional development. They are, and reading journal articles and stuff like that. I try to keep up with current events, even if it's in the Tribune Review or something.

This participant has not attended any trainings or professional development sessions.

Participant 2 Response

I honestly have just come up with things on my own.

This participant has had multiple trainings through the Olweus Program, which are district-wide. The counselor has also been trained as a trainer, and is now able to offer the professional development to the rest of the middle school staff. The professional development is a priority in the district, and is an annual component of their initial in-service days at the beginning of the school year.

Participant 3 Response

We've had all of our teachers trained, we've had administration guidance, secretaries, bus drivers, paraprofessionals, everyone. Cafeteria workers were trained; everyone who interacts with the students was trained. They all know the program and we really hit it home. We ingrained it in all of their brains the first and second year and then it's really just made it so much easier. When we did the training for the bus drivers, they were impressed that we even thought of them and we thought that it was a priority to have their buses be bully-free. They were really excited about that. I definitely think it comes from the top down. As long as the administration buys in, then it only filters down, because they don't have a choice but to do it.

I was trained as an Olweus trainer. We just did that right off the bat. As soon as they decided on the program, they took two of us and we went to the three-day training, got trained so that we can then come back and train our staff here and

keep the program going in a less expensive way. We've been doing that. We've since passed it on to two other people so that we weren't lifers in the program, but I still maintain the coordination of this building here along with one of the teachers. Every year at the beginning of the year, one of the first things we do with staff is a little refresher on Olweus.

Not only does this participant discuss trainings that she acquired, but also the benefit of having a mentor early on in her career, and the need to self-educate when it comes to prevention and intervention strategies to combat bullying.

Participant 6 Response

I would say my advantage was that I did, at the beginning of my career, have some training and I also had different experiences when it came to, not just bully-proofing programs, but then also creating a bully-proofing program that worked for your school. I'm very fortunate, and very fortunate that my first experience was amazing. One of the reasons why is because their procedures and policies were very solid. For a learning person, the mentoring that happened there for me, the professional, was outstanding. The programs they already had in place, and having the caliber of teachers that don't show resistance, that are very into all of these things and being able to make it work, was one of the most fulfilling experiences that I could ever have. What I would say to that is, yes, you have to use your judgment as a professional but you also have to educate yourself.

Summary of Training and Impact of Intervention Strategies

Out of the six school counselors who participated, only one has annual training through the Olweus program or any other type of program. This district-wide initiative

has been in place for approximately six years and everyone who interacts with the students are trained. In addition, the school counselor, who also possesses the certification to be a trainer of the program, gives refresher training to the staff at the beginning of every year. The program is consistently adhered to and monitored, weekly meetings occur, and with the addition of Sprigeo, an anonymous reporting system, the counselor and administration are able to react to situations immediately and prevent future incidents through cross-referencing the data with nurse reports, absences, and discipline reports.

Another participant discussed the importance of having a mentor in the early years of counseling, someone who can share their experiences and what has worked for them in lieu of formal training. Similarly, another participant spoke to the assistance prior administrators and counselors have given her with regards to student part behaviors and past interventions. One participant stated that she attends workshops and conferences when she finds them, and that her district is supportive in sending her to the professional development sessions. The other participants have all either not had any formal training, or are not able to attend formal training because of budget constraints. They stated that they have learned what to do from experience and seeing what works in their interaction with the students and not through any formal training.

Summary

Six middle school counselors from middle schools in western Pennsylvania participated in semi-structured one-on-one interviews to determine how to best intervene in bullying situations and also what methods of prevention have been most successful in their experience. This chapter presented an overview of the data collected from the six

middle school counselors' responses to semi-structured one-on-one interviews after it was coded and analyzed. The data were collected, transcribed, analyzed, and coded through the use of NVIVO software.

When discussing bullying experience, only a few counselors could describe actual bullying events in their schools, by the definition of bullying. Most of what they have experienced is conflict, and the participants stressed the importance of teaching all who are involved the difference between bullying and conflict. Philosophies of bully prevention and intervention varied among all who participated, with one school implementing the Olweus program in conjunction with an online reporting system. Another only used the online reporting system, and the others have either developed their own curriculum, method of prevention, or system that works in that particular building. Formal training was sparse. Only one counselor has received formal training while using the Olweus program. Others discussed the assistance that professional mentoring provides, the need for counselors and administrators to have an open and trusting relationship, and the varying techniques that have been useful, in their experience, when working with bullies, victim, and bystanders.

The following chapter will discuss the impact these responses had on the research questions posed. This chapter will also recommend topics for future studies and examine themes that emerged through the interview process.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bullying behavior has been labeled as such since the middle of the 1800s (Olweus, 2003). This repetitive aggressive behavior impacts students, families, and communities in ways that can leave a lasting mark, changing lives forever (Esbensen, 2009; Sigurdson, 2015). Students have committed horrific acts of violence as a result of aggressive repeated behavior directed toward them (Cullen, 2009; Hardway, 2014). Since a majority of this behavior occurs during adolescence (Harris, 2002), schools continue to work with fervor to combat bullying, spending both time and money to educate school district personnel, families, students, and the community on the dangers of bullying, and how to appropriately intervene and prevent these behaviors from happening. The result has been an increase in discussion, research, programs, prevention and intervention activities, training, and professional development, all of which are meant to teach tolerance of others, and dissuade aggressive or exclusive behaviors.

Starting after Columbine, which was a highly publicized tragic act of school violence executed by two reported victims of bullying (Cullen, 2009), discussions surrounding this topic increased in quantity as schools grew more alarmed and as multiple other school tragedies occurred. The need for intervention became more apparent, and as a result, the role of the school counselor has grown to include promoting academic success but also responding to and preventing students from bullying one another, determining when the perpetrator needs administrative intervention, providing respite for the victim, and empowering the bystander to stand up and defend those they witness being bullied (Cunningham, 2007; Finkel, 2012). The majority of these additions

to the school counselor's responsibilities have happened at the middle school level, with students in grades six through eight, as this is where research has demonstrated that bullying most often takes place (McManis, 2012; Harris, 2002; Crothers, 2001).

Because of the shift in roles and responsibilities, this study sought to more deeply examine the role of the middle school counselor, discuss his or her experiences with bullying behaviors, analyze which philosophies and methods of intervention and prevention they employ and with which they have had the most success, and also examine what training has been delivered to the counselors, and how those trainings have impacted the interactions middle school counselors have with students. The purpose of this study was to provide a richer understanding of the phenomenon of bullying through a qualitative lens, gaining insight from middle school counselors through semi-structured one-on-one interviews. It was the expectation of the researcher to assemble a collection of best practices when dealing with the triad of individuals who compose a bullying situation, specifically the bully, the victim, and the bystander.

The objective of this chapter was to reexamine the purpose of the study and the insight gained from the analysis of the data provided from the interviews, correlate the information to the research questions and then discuss the significance of the outcomes as they apply to the research questions. The study sought to examine in what way middle school counselors handle bullying situations and how they choose to provide support to all involved. It also investigated professional development opportunities, trainings, and programs that prevent or intervene in aggressive behaviors, and how these educational activities have allowed the counselors to make better choices when working toward bully intervention or prevention. Because of the sensitivity and emotions often attached to this

subject, the researcher believed that a qualitative approach was more appropriate and would allow for the depth of conversation and the richness of data that was sought for this study.

Summary of Purpose of the Study

Bullying is a topic of high interest, high emotion, and high sensitivity, especially with violent events occurring more frequently in schools across the nation. More locally, the subject of bullying was stated to be a reason for violence in the Franklin Regional School District, a suburban school district in western Pennsylvania. When these acts of aggression are continually found in the news, bullying is on the forefront of peoples' minds. Researchers have completed numerous quantitative studies looking for the root causes of aggressive behaviors, and research has also been completed regarding the outcome of constant victimization (Espelage, 2014; Guerra, 2011; Sigurdson, 2015). Although individuals have tried to find a one-size-fits-all method to prevent bullying, the distinctive nature of young adolescents and the experiences they bring with them, make it nearly impossible to prescribe one method above all others. However, in examining the professionals who are often charged with handling these situations; teachers, administrators, parents, and school counselors, the researcher set out to determine what works through the lens of the middle school counselor, who is often charged with the task of handling these situations. Delving into the experiences these counselors have with bullying behaviors, the methods of intervention and the philosophies they employ in order to see a positive change in student aggression or exclusion, as well as how these counselors learned to handle these moments, and finally what they might suggest to other

counselors in order for them to be successful were the basis of the research and the purpose of this study.

Summary of Research Methodology

A qualitative method was utilized for this study in order to get the most detailed information from the participants (Creswell, 2012). Although other methods could have been implemented, the information gained through interviews allows for a deeper connection between researcher and participant. Middle schools in the ten counties that make up western Pennsylvania which house grades six, seven, and eight were afforded the opportunity to participate. Actual participants were from six middle schools in four counties throughout western Pennsylvania. The participants varied in location and years of experience, with the least amount of years being nine and the most being nineteen. After the proper permissions were gained, semi-structured interview questions related to the research questions (see Appendix A) were completed face-to-face or on the phone, depending on each participant's availability. Through these interviews, the following research questions were examined:

1. What types of experiences have middle school guidance counselors had with bullying behavior?
2. What philosophies of intervention have school counselors utilized with regards to the bully, victim, and bystander, and how do these counselors determine which approach is most appropriate?
3. What types of training have school counselors received with regards to bully prevention and intervention, and based on this training and level of experience, which

philosophy or method of intervention do the counselors believe to be most successful and most frequently utilized?

The data gathered from the interviews were transcribed and then member checked by the participants to ensure accuracy and completion of the information. At this time, participants were also offered the opportunity to provide additional material or information to the researcher. Theory triangulation occurred through the researcher demonstrating a correlation to existing theories of intervention to the philosophies and methods of intervention and prevention discussed by the participants (Rothbauer, 2008). The theories included in this study were Comprehensive Social Learning Theory, Common Group Theory, and Person-Centered Theory. When the existing research was examined, methods of intervention and prevention were primarily grouped into these three areas, with the first being a whole group philosophy of intervention where students learn from one another through a comprehensive approach, the second being more of a small group of people with common experiences, and the last working with a person one-on-one in an attempt to personalize the intervention and prevention process for that individual (McLeod, 2011; Tindale, 2002; Dulli, 2006; Kodžopeljić, 2014).

Limitations

This study was limited to middle school counselors in western Pennsylvania who currently hold full-time positions in middle schools that include grades six through eight. The interviews were conducted with six individuals who were employed within four counties in western Pennsylvania, so the experiences shared are those of the participants only.

Although a qualitative study is not as comprehensive as one which may take into account the perspectives of larger groups of individuals, it was the intent of this study to look at the perspectives and experiences of these counselors on a deeper level, spending time discussing experiences and personal strategies for intervention and prevention in bullying situations. The strategies and experiences may not be able to be applied to all who are involved in aggressive situations, but the intent of the study was to gather perspectives from those who work closely with these types of situations, namely middle school counselors, and then examine that information to see what common themes apply.

Middle school students have been identified in the existing research as the age where bullying behaviors are most commonly seen (Wigfield, 2005; Ramsey, 2010; McManis, 2012; Harris, 2002), which is the reason middle school counselors were chosen for this study; however, another limitation is the exclusion of elementary and high school counselors. Therefore, the information received was only applicable to middle school students and counselors.

Due to the nature of the semi-structured interviews, during the process of talking with the participants, additional experiences and information were shared, leading to further questions being asked that were not on the original interview protocol. These questions added to the breadth of the information gathered and deepened the conversation between researcher and participant.

Conclusions

Qualitative data were collected during semi-structured interviews with middle school counselors who have between nine and nineteen years of experience. The data were then analyzed, looking for themes and commonalities, as well as any other

information that materialized from the conversations. A few common themes did emerge from the analysis, some of which were not expected as a result of the inquiries, and others that paralleled the existing research that was explored during the review of the literature. All counselors specified there is a strong need to educate stakeholders on the difference between conflict and bullying. The counselors also discussed the importance of administrative support and trust when handling student concerns. Empowering bystanders to feel comfortable and supported in reporting instances of bullying was reported as a requirement, and if those feelings are not there, the chances of bystanders reporting decline drastically. Helping victims develop strategies to alleviate harassment was an important part of the role of the counselor, and working with bullies to determine the cause of their aggression was also a common theme.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 1 – Experience with Bullying

This research question sought to investigate the experiences middle school counselors have with bullying. The interview questions for this portion of the dialogue sought to gain an initial understanding of what the participants have experienced during their tenure as middle school counselors, and then examine these experiences for commonalities. The participants spoke collectively of boys being more physical in their aggression, whereas girls were more relational, with exclusion and gossip being their primary means of harassment, all of which correlates with the existing research regarding bullying and relational aggression (Taylor, 2007; Redden, 2013; McEachern, 2012). They also stated that overall they deal with girls regarding conflict and bullying situations more than boys. Surprisingly, only two counselors described instances of what they referred to as “true bullying” occurring, one of which involved police intervention and

harassment charges being filed, and the other was taunted and surrounded by others who actually began to be physical with her. Although the participants have collectively over 50 years of experience, only two were able to share what they considered to be experiences that aligned with the definition of bullying. All other occurrences they shared they referred to as conflict, or students just not getting along. When asked to expand on their experience of conflict versus bullying, all participants had much to share.

Bullying vs. Conflict

The participants overwhelmingly agreed, almost immediately upon asking about their professional experiences with bullying, that the need exists for parents, students, teachers, and other stakeholders to receive focused education on the difference between conflict and what they referred to as “true bullying”, as most of their experiences were with conflict and not actually bullying. They spoke of the need to understand the meaning of bullying, and detailed when most students came to them claiming they were the victims of bullying, it was not true bullying, but conflict. The participants also felt that the word bullying is overused, and as soon as a student has a problem or a disagreement with another peer, that student (or parent) claimed he or she was being bullied, when in fact; it might just have been someone being mean to them, or not being a good friend, or they simply had a bad day. The participants indicated that they spend a large portion of the day dealing with students who were simply not being friendly, calling names, instigation, isolation, or the like. The action was not repetitive and it was not meant to take away the power of the victim, so the counselors viewed it as conflict and not bullying. This theme emerged almost immediately during the interviews, and was consistent among all six participants.

Cyber-conflict and Cyber-bullying

In addition to discussing the need for distinction between bullying and conflict when experience with bullying was analyzed, the participants shared experiences with what has become a more recent issue, cyber-conflict. This discussion was not part of the original research, but emerged during the interviews with most of the participants.

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and other forms of social media were cause for negative encounters among students. Text messaging allows students to send messages they might not say face to face with someone, inappropriate pictures are sent and passed along, sometimes to a viral extent. The participants stated that technology and the increase in personal devices have led to an increase in this type of conflict among middle school students. Most instances were with students saying hurtful things to one another or spreading rumors, and many share this information with a large number of others, therefore exasperating the problem and causing additional distress to the victim. Often the exchange occurs outside of school, but the lingering effects of the conflict can make its way into the school day, causing interruptions and additional disagreement throughout the school building.

Counselors' Perceived Reasons for Bullying

While discussing experiences with bullying and conflict, the participants also shared reasons they believe these types of behaviors occur, which was another common theme that emerged from the interviews. A shared statement among the participants is that the motives for these bullying behaviors tend to differ between boys and girls. Situations with girls seem to be more socially and emotionally charged, as they tend to be more focused on reputation and popularity than the boys, who do not put as much

emphasis on those particular matters. The counselors indicated that the repetitive smaller situations that happen to girls tend to chip away at their self-worth and make it easier for them to be a target the next time. Also, one participant stated that at this age (middle school), the students just do not possess the emotional maturity to be able to handle these online situations, so they feel the need to come to the counselor over and over, sometimes just wanting to rehash the same situation, and it becomes the task of the counselor to redirect their thoughts back toward the school day. Another said that many students just do not possess the skills to be a good friend, and that lack of trustworthy and confidential qualities often times is the reason behind the conflict. With boys, the participants said that they have experienced a victim starting to bully, not wanting to be the victim anymore. However, it appears more simplistic in nature with instigation and name calling often leading to conflict among boys, who then become physical with one another.

Regarding cyber-conflicts, the counselors shared that the lack of maturity and coping skills were the main reason behind the students' not being able to handle the harassment or aggression that happened online. Telling a student to "block" someone online who was being aggressive or hurtful was a simple solution, but the students were still focused on what was being said, and typically wound up viewing that person's posts again and again.

With the time, money, and energy being placed on bullying, the researcher found it noteworthy that only two of the participants could discuss experience with what the participants referred to as "true bullying" situations; however, they all spent some time discussing their experience with student conflict. One might analyze this outcome and

conclude that the programs for intervention and prevention are successfully eliminating bullying and relational aggression. However, as the conversations continued, the philosophies of intervention along with programs of prevention did not lend itself to that conclusion.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 2 – Philosophies of Intervention

For this portion of the study, participants were asked to detail what philosophies of intervention they implement with the students when working through a bullying situation along with any formalized programs specifically for bully prevention and intervention that is utilized in their schools or districts. All six participants had varying philosophies that led to fluctuating techniques for intervention. Only one of the six participants schools utilized formalized method and program. The counselors found that most philosophies and techniques for intervention were simply doing what worked for her with the students in her school. Another counselor was mentored by another counselor earlier in her career when they worked together, which assisted in developing her philosophy of intervention and prevention strategies, and the other participants' philosophies were created through simply assessing the situation and doing what they felt would work best. The only participant whose school currently has a formal method of school-wide bully prevention and intervention utilizes the Olweus Bully Prevention Program. This is used in conjunction with Sprigeo, an anonymous online reporting system. Another participant's school used a combination of Olweus and Bully Proofing, but in a manner that she has developed. Sprigeo was used as a stand-alone means of increased communication with a third, and the remaining participants did not utilize any

specific program, but did have philosophies of intervention and prevention they implemented on their own.

The variety of interventions, programs, and methods that were shared with the researcher are detailed below, with the first being the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, a prevention and intervention program used by only one participant's school and is a district-wide initiative.

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

When discussing philosophies of intervention and prevention, only one participant shared her experience with using the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in her middle school. Olweus Bully Prevention Program is widely recognized as a long-term, encompassing program which includes multiple components such as intensive training for all who have contact with students, weekly meetings with small groups of students where prepared lessons are taught to the students, and data is gathered through surveys at the end of the year, allowing the school staff to adapt the program to the needs of the building (University, 2015). The program has been used for seven years throughout the entire district, including the middle school. Everyone who has contact with students is trained, including bus drivers, cafeteria employees, secretaries, and the like. The students meet once a week during homeroom to go through the lessons provided by the program. Staff all are trained in how to best handle bullying situations, aggression, and conflict, in a consistent and regular manner, using a common language. In addition, the implementation of Sprigeo has added to the level of communication students have with the adults in the building. As yet another measure of communication, comment boxes are placed throughout the hallways and checked daily by staff while on hall duty. These

systems enable students to relay information in a confidential manner, and the procedure is consistently followed.

Additionally, as part of the program, staff is given updated training at the beginning of each year and any new staff also receives the initial training. The counselor was trained to be a trainer, allowing the information to be shared without having to leave the district. During this time, the data from the survey collected at the end of the previous school year is analyzed, and changes in things such as increased supervision in certain areas reported as ‘hot spots’ occur. This participant stated that the superintendent made the elimination of bullying a district-wide focus and priority, the Olweus program has been implemented with fidelity through all grade levels and buildings within the district.

The school-wide approach to bully prevention, along with the consistent conversation, meaningful analysis of the data received from the students, and the focus on bully reduction from the superintendent all appear to be what makes this philosophy successful. The system in place is organized, all stakeholders manage it collectively, the topic of bullying prevention is a priority and deemed important by adults and students, and it has been in place for a number of years.

Olweus was only described as used by one middle school out of the six participants. Although the other participants did not detail using the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program alone as a means of bullying prevention and intervention, one other participant did share a philosophy that included components of the Olweus Program, but was adapted to be more personalized for her students and school. Additional participants described similar philosophies.

Personalized Intervention Philosophies

Another participant discussed how she has taken her years of experience and knowledge of various bullying prevention programs to develop a philosophy and strategy that has been successful for her middle school. By utilizing components of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, the Bully Proofing Your School Program, and a Digital Citizenship component that tackles the online component of bully prevention and intervention, this counselor has created a comprehensive program that she has individualized for her school and the issues she has deemed as important to her students.

The method the participant has developed still incorporate the meetings that Olweus specifies, but they are held once a month, not once a week, and they only include the teachers, not any of the other school staff. The lessons to be taught during that time are all placed in a binder and scripted. The scripted lessons ensure that the language used is consistent, and the students are all receiving the same message during that lesson. Her reasoning for this was that she appreciated what parts of each had to offer, and then wanted to incorporate the digital citizenship component as a means of the recent cyber-conflict her students have been experiencing, so she decided to incorporate what she felt was the best of all programs into one, individualizing for her students and their needs.

One other school utilizes the anonymous reporting system, Sprigeo, but aside from that, has no formal program or method of intervention or prevention. The other three participants discussed strategies and philosophies they implement, but not through any formalized system. The participant who utilizes the lunchroom as a method of prevention and intervention stressed the importance of building relationships with her

students, gaining their trust and getting to know who their friends are, who they hang out with, and being right in the forefront of their social time, the school lunch period.

Other strategies discussed were assemblies whose topic is bully prevention, a small smattering of conferences and professional development opportunities for counselors, and aside from that, the participants discussed intervening however they felt appropriate given the student or students who were having the problem. This led to specific philosophies and methods of intervention by participant, as they were different for each, as described by the participants.

Individualized Intervention Philosophies for the Victim, Bully, and Bystander

When asked how to best help the victim, all participants discussed the need for bullying to stop for the victims. They also described their personal feelings of responsibility toward making that happen. Teaching the victim coping skills and working with them to prepare a plan for when conflict occurs seems to be the first steps. Building that relationship of trust between the counselor and student so he or she knows what is being said is being heard and taken seriously is also crucial in how to help the victim. Allowing them to make the decision of what happens, albeit peer mediation, schedule change, parent phone call, talking to the person causing the conflict, or some other suggestion allows the victim, who often feels out of control, to have some control over what is happening to him or her. Finally, one counselor discussed training the victim in assertiveness, which was a unique philosophy only mentioned by her. This idea teaches the students to be assertive in what they want to happen, for example, telling the person demonstrating aggression to stop, but remains somewhat passive in their demeanor (Çeçen-Eroğul, A. R., & Zengel, M., 2009). Judging the victim's readiness to participate

in that kind of intervention is something that the counselor and parents can decide along with the victim, but was said to be an empowering method for those who are ready.

When methods of intervention for the bully were discussed, the effort made by counselors is one that taught the aggressors empathy. Working with the student who was being aggressive to understand how this feels to the victim, perhaps to help them remember a time when they were victimized themselves, finding out why they have this need for increased control over someone. The participants also stated that looking into the home lives of these students often can lead to understanding why the bully acts aggressively, especially if there was an aggressive parent at home. This was also the point where the participants referred to school policy and discussed that discipline policies were often implemented at this time, and applied with increased seriousness if the behavior did not stop.

Bystanders, or those who witness acts of aggression, are those who possess the power to make bullying stop, as described by the participants. Empowering the bystander, building that relationship of trust and anonymity with the school counselor, making sure that they know they are being heard, and reacting positively to their interventions are all imperative to the bystander repeating his or her behaviors. The addition of anonymous reporting systems like Sprigeo are put in place for the bystander, and giving him or her yet another means of communication in a safe and confidential manner.

Overall, the philosophies and methods of intervention and prevention strategies were not consistent among middle schools. They varied from having one program implemented exactly as it should be to having no real method of intervention in place,

simply using life and professional experience to work with students. Some counselors focused on building relationships with students whereas others focused on the consistency found in the lessons taught through the programs. The impact of the intervention techniques and trainings received were the final component of this study examined, and appear to be just as individualized as the techniques used to combat the aggressive behaviors.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 3 – Training and Impact of Intervention

Aside from the counselor who received direct training through the Olweus Program, none of the other participants were able to share any specific training they have received regarding bully prevention and intervention. Additionally, none of the other participants had attended any recent training or professional development sessions regarding bullying. “Academics become a higher priority,” as one participant stated. Another said that there is no money to attend professional development sessions at her school. Although bullying is a high priority topic, and one that gains media attention when something negative occurs in a school as a result of bullying, the lack of training and focus on professional development in this area demonstrates that this appears to be less of a concentration than academics in school systems.

Recommendations

The results of this study enabled the researcher to develop a series of recommendations that are viewed as best practices based on the information garnered from the participants. These practices can be applied and deemed effective for

counselors and other parties who have a vested interest in middle school students and bully prevention.

Throughout the research, it became apparent that counselors' roles in middle schools have changed and increased over the years to being an academically focused professional that assists students in course selections and maintaining scholastic success to one which can sometimes resemble more of a social worker, helping students gain the social and emotional skills to be able to cope with events that occur throughout their adolescent lives.

As stated numerous times during the interviews, the difference between conflict and bullying needs to be addressed in schools, with teachers, students, and parents. Utilizing times when schools have the attention of the parents, such as open houses, orientations, parent meetings, seem to be the most effective way to communicate this information. The word bullying is emotionally charged and when used, should gain immediate attention. However, it appears that by parents and students overusing the word bullying, or claiming someone is being bullied when it is simply conflict, is causing confusion among those directly involved. Understanding the definition of each and then using that definition to determine how to handle a situation between students what needs to happen every time. Conflict can become bullying, if it is repetitive and meant to take away the power of the other individual, but that repetition needs to be documented as does the relationship between the participants before that move from conflict to bullying can be recognized.

Intervention programs that are implemented with fidelity through a comprehensive approach, as demonstrated in the research, are likely to have the most

success in reduction of conflict and bullying (Kearney, 2014; Dranoff, 2006; Carter, 2011). Regular, ongoing training with everyone who has contact with the students is important to the uniformity of how aggressive situations are handled. Consistency of verbiage when handling bullying situations or conflict will enable the students and parents to understand the difference, hopefully reducing the times the word bullying is used to only when it is a repetitive situation.

Opportunities for training and professional development on the social and emotional coping skills for middle school students should be addressed regularly. Currently the participants shared that the focus remains on academics, and although that is a primary effort, the existing research has proven that students who are bullied or have regular conflict his or her peers do not attend school as regularly as those who are not. Students cannot be taught if they are absent from school. Therefore, the consideration for a student's mental well-being needs to be a focus along with academics.

The relationship between counselors and administrators is one that needs to be complete with trust and communication. Since the counselor is typically the first line of intervention with these situations, once it is deemed to be a more serious or repetitive type of action, the counselor then requests the intervention of school administration. The administration needs to be able to trust that counselor's recommendation and then move forward with school policy regarding harassment or bullying.

Another additional observation made during the interview process was the correlation between counselors' approaches to bullying prevention and intervention and the individual counselor's personality type. Although this was not originally a part of the study, as the process evolved, it became more apparent that there was a connection. For

example, Participant 2 was very nurturing and maternal in how she handled incidents of aggression, and this was also apparent in her communication with the researcher.

Participant 6 was extremely organized and thorough in her explanations and information shared with the researcher during the interview, and her methodology of intervention and prevention was also organized and comprehensive, with teachers being provided with curricular materials and a binder filled with information and resources for the faculty.

Participant 1 was very matter-of-fact and to the point in her responses, and her technique in handling aggression was also to the point and simple; she stated she simply followed the handbook policy and procedures. Through this study, it grew apparent that counselors do not have one specific method of intervention or prevention, but tend to choose an approach with which they feel most comfortable, correlating with his or her personality.

Opportunities for Future Research

Completion of this study offered multiple opportunities for future research. This study was completed with middle school counselors in western Pennsylvania, but could be replicated in any geographical area. It would also be interesting to see if the intervention philosophies would change if applied to urban school settings or rural school settings. Since this study was completed with middle school students, it could also be replicated with students in intermediate schools in order to determine at what age these types of behaviors are beginning. Further areas for future research include analyzing the difference between bullying and conflict in middle schools with relation to how often it occurs. Since all of the participants detailed most of their experiences to be conflict and not true bullying, a more thorough description of conflict along with the point where it

becomes bullying needs to be specified and then shared with stakeholders. The addition of cyber-conflict and cyber-bullying is becoming more prevalent in school systems. This more recent and new form of bullying and conflict needs to be analyzed along with philosophies and methods of prevention and intervention that can be implemented. Finally, the correlation between bullying prevention and intervention approaches and counselor's personality type needs to be explored further and in a more standardized setting. This connection may explain why some interventions are chosen over another.

Summary

This phenomenological study sought to examine the experiences middle school counselors had with bullying situations and what trainings and professional development they have received regarding bully prevention. The study then looked to examine what programs or plans of intervention or prevention are in place at their school currently and the success of said programs. Finally, the researcher intended to gather philosophies of intervention and prevention for the bully, victim, and bystander in order to determine what methods are most impactful. The literature showed that bullying occurs most often with students in middle school, with boys being more physical in their aggression and girls being more relational (Crapanzano, 2010; Harris, 2002). The literature also demonstrated that there are three main types of intervention methods that are Comprehensive Social Learning Theory, Common Group Theory, and Person-Centered Theory (Bandura, 1971; Hall, 2006; Beaty, 2008). According to the six participants who are all middle school counselors in western Pennsylvania, all three of these theories of intervention are a basis for their philosophies of intervention and are used in various programs and methods in their middle schools. Although all of the participants'

intervention and prevention techniques differed according to the situation, the fundamental conclusion at the end of this research study is that school systems need to educate stakeholders on the difference between bullying and conflict. Additionally, the need for consistency with regards language is necessary among all school personnel to avoid confusion and overuse of the word bullying when the interaction might be conflict. The most successful program when analyzing the participants' responses was the one that impacted the whole school, was implemented with fidelity, and regular staff training was received. With regards to specialized support, there is a perceived lack of professional development and training offered to the counselors and school staff on this subject, as academics appear to take precedent over social and emotional concerns. When examining the bully, victim, and bystander individually with regards to intervention philosophies, the counselors intervene with bullies and try to teach empathy and also attempt to find a root cause for their aggressive behavior. Victims must build a level of trust with the counselor in order to be able to share what is happening to them, also knowing they are being heard and their insecurities are being addressed so they can focus on academics is imperative to their success. Finally, bystanders must be given opportunities to address what they witness, albeit through online reporting systems or simply by the counselor being around the students on a regular basis.

Bullying and student conflict happen all over the world on a daily basis. The addition of personal technological devices has made it so that students cannot get away from the negativity. This affects their social, emotional and physical well being on a daily basis. Horrific acts of violence have happened as a result of students being met with repeated aggression, especially in a school setting, which should be a safe place.

School counselors have the power to make significant change with this phenomenon, but need the support of their colleagues, parents, and students. Harnessing the collective power of middle school students to make positive change in their schools might seem like an insurmountable task, but working one day at a time, making change one step at a time, might make all the difference in the world to a child experiencing aggression first hand.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol Questions

1. Research Question 1- What types of experiences have middle school guidance counselors had with bullying behavior?

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about some typical bullying behaviors you have dealt with in your experience as a counselor.
 2. Tell me about your school's theory of bully prevention and intervention.
 3. What methods or curriculum go along with that philosophy.
 4. What other experiences do you have with bullies? Victims? Bystanders?
 5. On a daily basis, which bullying behaviors are most common?
2. Research Question 2 - What philosophies or methods of intervention have school counselors utilized with regards to the bully, victim, and bystander and how do these counselors determine which approach is most appropriate?

Interview Questions:

6. Describe to me a typical situation that transpires regarding bullying in your school.
7. Tell me about a time you had a student come to your office regarding a bullying situation. How did you handle the situation? What made you choose to handle it that way?
8. Are there any other situations where you had to use a different approach? If so, why was that done?
9. Describe the thought process used to determine which intervention technique you choose to implement when dealing with bullies. Victims. Bystanders.

3. Research Question 3 - What types of training have school counselors received with regards to bully prevention and intervention, and based on this training and level of experience, which philosophy or philosophies of intervention do the counselors believe to be most successful and most frequently utilized?

Interview Questions:

10. What is your level of experience as a middle school counselor?
11. What is your level of experience in dealing with bullies, victims, and bystanders?
12. Describe any training or professional education you have received with regards to bully prevention and intervention. Tell me about the usefulness of the training. Tell me about a time you used a strategy that was suggested from these trainings. Was it successful? What made it successful or unsuccessful?
13. Describe to me what you believe to be the best way to handle a bully. A victim. A bystander.
14. What makes this more successful than other methods of intervention and prevention?
15. Describe what success looks like through the eyes of a victim. A bully. A bystander.

Appendix B

Administrator Consent Form

Dear Principal or Superintendent,

My name is Lisa Duval and I am a Doctoral student in the Administrative and Leadership Studies Program through Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I am conducting a study to better understand the intervention and prevention methods used by middle school counselors when working with students who exhibit bully behaviors, are victims of bullying, or who witness acts of aggression. The working title of my study is “A Study of School Counselors’ Methods of Bullying Intervention and Prevention”. Through information collected from middle school counselors, I hope to gain a better sense of the choices counselors make when dealing with these students and what they deem as successful means of intervention.

In order to conduct research with the counselor(s) in your middle school, I first need your approval. Please be assured that responses will be kept confidential, as will the names of participating districts. The interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. All participants will be given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and you will have the ability to view the results of this study upon its completion.

Kindly reply to this email (wnls@iup.edu) stating whether you approve of my contacting the school counselor(s) in your school or call me at (412) 605-2324. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me or my dissertation chair, Dr. Joseph Marcoline (j.f.marcoline@iup.edu).

Sincerely,

Lisa N. Duval
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Appendix C

Letter to School Counselors

Lisa N. Duval
3011 Valley Ridge Road
McKeesport, PA 15133
(412) 605-2324
wnls@iup.edu

Dear counselor,

A school counselor's voice within the school system is one which often times goes unknown or unheard, yet it is the counselor who manages not only the academic integrity of the school system, but also maintains the emotional and social health of the students, their parents or guardians and the community. Bullying plays a big part in all of those areas, and if a child does not feel safe or welcome in his or her school, then the chances of his or her being successful falters. After working in a middle school for sixteen years, with six of them being a middle school principal, I understand the energy and effort that the school counselor puts into these students and prevention and intervention techniques to address the bully, victim and bystander.

If you have had any such issues with school bullying and aggression, and would like the opportunity to share those experiences for a dissertation study in an individual interview with me, please complete the requested information below. The working title of my study is, "A Phenomenological Study of Middle School Counselors' Perceptions of Effective Bullying Intervention and Prevention", and I believe that counselors have a plethora of information which can be shared so other schools and districts can see, through your lens, what works and what doesn't when dealing with these situations.

Your individual interviews should last no more than one hour and they will be scheduled at a time and place convenient for you. You will also have the opportunity to review transcripts of your interview to verify the responses and see the results of the analysis.

Thank you for considering my request. I hope that your input will prove to be helpful in understanding what bully intervention and prevention techniques are most useful and appropriate with middle school students through a counselor's eyes.

Sincerely,

Lisa N. Duval
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Please complete the information below and send it to me at wpls@iup.edu or to the mailing address above. Or, if it is more convenient, please call me at (412) 605-2324.

Name:

School:

School District:

Email address:

Phone:

What is the best method to contact you?

When is the best time to contact you?

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

ALL PARTICIPANTS MUST READ AND SIGN:

This study is being conducted to collect data for a dissertation through the Administration and Leadership Studies Program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The purpose of this study is to ascertain how middle school counselors in Southwestern Pennsylvania respond to bullying behavior at their schools and what programs and/or techniques they feel are most effective.

If you agree to participate you will be asked to:

1. Sign this consent form
2. Participate in a one-on-one interview to be conducted at a time and place of your convenience.
3. Review a transcript of your interview and verify it for accuracy

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. There is no penalty for withdrawing or not participating.

There are no costs to participating in this study and no foreseeable risks or discomforts. All data collected will be kept confidential by assigning a pseudonym and all person-identifiable data will be coded so that confidentiality can be maintained.

Lisa N. Duval, a doctoral student in the Administration and Leadership Studies Program, is conducting this study at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. She can be reached at 412-605-2324 or [wnls@iup.edu](mailto:wpls@iup.edu). Her dissertation chair is Dr. Joseph Marcoline and he can be reached by email at j.f.marcoline@iup.edu or through phone at 724-357-2419.

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Phone Number