TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH STUDENT BULLYING IN FIVE RURAL
MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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DEDICATION

This dissertation study is dedicated to my wonderful wife, Cheryl, whose support for me has never wavered. Even in the most difficult times, she stood beside me and encouraged me to continue to pursue my goals, both in education and in life. Our life together has been nothing short of spectacular since the day she first blessed me with her love. Amber, my daughter, is a true gift from above. Her commitment to the arts and lifelong learning, her spirit and her personality continue to make me proud. I also wish to dedicate this study to my mother and my father, who have continued to believe in me; and to my grandparents, who always knew I would succeed. To these wonderful people, I will be forever grateful.

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ABSTRACT

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Bullying is a common form of school violence, which is a major issue of concern for students, parents, teachers, and administrators across the country. Episodes of school violence beginning in the 1990s have created a national focus on school safety and the problems associated with bullying. Schools across the country are attempting to deal with the problem of student bullying by writing anti-bullying policies, instituting bully-prevention programs, and developing character-education programs. Because teachers spend the most time with and around students, they are often the most familiar with the issues their students face. They have the opportunity to observe bullying as it takes place in schools.

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher experiences with student bullying. Data were collected from interviews with 13 different teachers in 5 rural middle schools. Information from the interviews was divided into three domains: Teachers' Experiences with Student Bullying; Interventions; and Professional Development and Participation in the Development of Policy. Interviews revealed a diverse set of teacher

experiences with student bullying as told through each teacher's story. Several common categories emerged from the data including: (a) dimensions of bullying, (b) discrimination and harassment, (c) adolescent behavior and development, (d) the secrecy of bullying, and (e) teachers' perceptions.

The second domain included interventions which teachers considered to be effective or ineffective. The following types of interventions emerged from the teacher interviews: (a) observation of student behavior, (b) trusting relationship, (c) counseling students, (e) involving others, (f) and unsure how to handle the situation. The last section listed the types of professional development teachers had been exposed to, and whether or not teachers had participated in the development of anti-bullying policy.

Information gathered from the interviews revealed that teachers thought bullying was a serious issue for schools and it was important for them to be able to know and recognize bullying when it happens. Teachers also said that bullying can happen in many forms including physical, verbal, emotional, and psychological. They said socialization and the developmental changes middle school students go through tend to compound bullying. Teachers were divided as to the impact of the rural environment on student bullying but agreed that their schools probably experience less bullying than schools serving more urban or suburban populations.

The most frequent intervention teachers discussed was the development of a trusting relationship between teachers and students. Teachers also listed team teaching and character-education programs as effective interventions for dealing with student bullying.

The interviews revealed that very few teachers had experienced any sort of professional development in relation to student bullying, and very few had been involved with the development of anti-bullying policy.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

Tuesday, April 20, 1999 changed America's vision of school violence forever. In Littleton, Colorado, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold stormed into Columbine High School armed with guns and bombs. When the day was over, 12 classmates, a teacher, and the 2 perpetrators were dead. More than 20 other persons were injured. President Clinton, addressing the students of Columbine a month later, said: "What happened to you has pierced the soul of America" (as cited in Hunt, 1999). The Columbine tragedy represented one of the deadliest examples of school violence in America's history. More importantly, it changed the way schools address the terrors associated with violence in schools (Cable News Network [CNN], 2009).

Prothrow-Stith and Spivak (2003) chronicled a list of high-profile, violent incidents involving students— all of which resulted in fatalities. In 1997, 3 separate incidents occurred involving: a 16-year-old boy who killed 2 persons and injured 2 others in Bethel, Alaska; another 16-year-old who killed 3 people, including his mother and his ex-girlfriend, and injured 7 others; and a 14-year-old who killed 3 people and wounded 5. In 1998, the violence continued with 4 more incidents including an incident in which 2 middle school students killed 5 people and wounded 10; a 14-year-old who killed 1 student and injured several others at a school dance; a 15-year-old who killed 2 and injured 22 others; and another 15-year-old who killed his classmate.

In the wake of school-related violent acts beginning in the late 1990s, school violence has become a top concern in the United States. School districts have taken

measures to improve security by adding metal detectors, school conduct codes, increased communication and collaboration with law enforcement, and visitor registration (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2007).

Perhaps due to increased attention to school safety, statistics indicate a decline in the most violent crimes at school over the last several years. Research from the NCES (2007) showed that violent crimes and serious violent crimes at school declined between 1992 and 2005. However, violence such as theft, drugs, and bullying continue to cause problems for American schools.

Two distinct categories of students have been identified for the purposes of this study: bullies and victims. According to the United States Department of Education (2008) bullies are students who dominate other students either through physical (overt) means or psychological (relational) bullying. Bullying can be hitting, fighting, name calling, spreading rumors about another person, ostracizing, or a host of other behaviors that are intended to inflict hurt on another student (Ahmad and Smith, 1994; Smith and Sharp, 1994).

A study conducted in 2005 found that more than a quarter of all students in the United States report being bullied in a six month period (NCES, 2006). In the rural Midwest, it is estimated that as many as 90% of students have been bullied at least once (Hoover and Oliver, 1996).

Victims of bullying experience negative physical, emotional and psychological effects, which can follow students into adulthood. Studies have indicated that students continue to be victims over long periods of time (Bowles and Lesperance, 2004). Students who are victims of harassment may develop fear and anxiety, may be unable to

develop strong social relationships with others, are often mistrusting of those in authority, and may experience problems handling aggression (Blazer, 2005). Victims of bullying sometimes take their own lives due to the frustration and isolation they feel from being victimized at school (Kim, Koh, and Leventhal, 2005; Klomek, Marrocco, and Kleinman, 2007). In at least two highly publicized incidents, students who were victims of bullying lashed out in violent ways against not only the students who bullied them, but also innocent bystanders. The Columbine tragedy in April 1999 and an incident in San Diego, CA in 2001 are examples of how victims of bullying can take out their aggression on others. The Columbine incident left 12 students dead, and 15 students were shot by a 15-year-old student in the San Diego incident. Both examples involved students who opened fire on their peers after being victims of bullying for many years (Bowles and Lesperance, 2004).

Bullying is a common form of school violence which occurs often in middle school and seems to peak between sixth and ninth grades (Olweus, 1993; Banks, 1997). During middle school, students begin to mature both physiologically and emotionally. Student experiences during this crucial time help to identify how they react and will react with the world around them through high school and into adulthood. Wommack and Delville (2007) studied the effects of bullying during puberty and found that, in other species, the onset of puberty brought a change from play-fighting to adult aggression. Phillips (2004) suggested that students bullied before puberty appeared to be able to overcome the problems associated with bullying; however, those bullied for the first time during puberty seemed to become more aggressive and exhibited tendencies to turn to alcohol as a coping mechanism.

The existing research has shown a need for better understanding of bullying problems in schools, particularly in rural schools. Research has indicated the possibility that rural students experience bullying more frequently than students in urban or suburban areas (Dulmus, Theriot, Sowers, and Blackburn, 2004). Although several studies have examined the phenomenon of bullying in rural schools, (e.g. Bachus ,1994; Bowles and Lesperance, 2004; DeLara, 2000; Dulmus et al. 2004; Harris and Isernhagen, 2003; Hektner and Swenson, 2006; Hoover and Oliver, 1996; Isernhagen and Harris, 2004; Patterson, Ramsey, and Womack, 2005; Schroth and Fishbaugh, 2000; Srebalus and David, 1996; Stockdale, Hangaduambo and Duys, 2002) in most cases, these studies, although conducted in rural settings, may not represent a problem which is truly and uniquely rural. In addition, few studies have studied in-depth the problem of bullying in rural schools resulting in a lack of information about those students. Coladarci (2007) discussed the need to compare a phenomenon in different cultural contexts such as rural, urban, and suburban settings. It is outside the scope of this study to compare results to bullying research conducted in an urban setting.

Much research has been conducted about bullying; however, there have not been many studies focused on teachers' experiences with student bullying in rural middle schools. Because of their daily contact with students, teachers often have more opportunity than others to witness bullying in schools. Teachers also have more opportunities than others involved in bullying incidents to help students. By learning about teachers' experiences with student bullying, educators can gain a better understanding of the bullying problem in rural middle schools and the strategies teachers have found effective in dealing with bullying.

Research Questions

The information gathered and analyzed from qualitative interviews with rural middle school teachers will help to enable educators to implement successful counseling and intervention programs that address the problem of bullying. The potential for long-term emotional, social, and psychological difficulties associated with school bullying in rural middle schools demands an in-depth qualitative study to answer the following research questions:

- What kind of experiences have teachers had with student bullying in rural middle schools?

- How have these teachers handled these experiences?

- What interventions do teachers find effective and ineffective in addressing bullying in rural middle schools?

- What kinds of training have teachers had in regard to bullying?

- What roles do teachers play in developing anti-bully policies and practices in rural middle schools?

Significance of the Study

Bullying is a common form of school violence, which is a major concern for students, teachers, administrators, and parents. Bullying seems to intensify during the middle school years and can have long-term effects on not only the victims, but also the bullies themselves. Students who are victims of bullying can develop deep, psychological or emotional problems, which may affect them in adulthood, often interfering with their ability to develop or sustain social relationships. Students who demonstrate bullying-type

behavior often develop negative, aggressive patterns which continue into adulthood and lead to problems associated with criminal behavior.

Teachers have the opportunity to witness the phenomenon of bullying in its purest form. Because they spend more time with students than any other adult, they are able to witness the complexities of student bullying, including the problems students face in relation to bullying, how they and students cope with bullying, and what interventions are effective in dealing with bullying. Teachers are on the front lines, in the classrooms and in the halls, where bullying takes place. It seems proper that, in order to learn more about student bullying in rural middle schools, I should interview those teachers who see it every day.

The goal of this study is to learn more about student bullying by calling on the experiences of teachers who have dealt with those issues. By talking to teachers about their experiences, researchers and school personnel can gain a better understanding of student bullying and the complexities which surround it. In addition, the information gathered from this study may reveal more effective interventions for dealing with bullying, as well as guide professional development and policy concerns for schools.

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

Bully, as used in this study, a person(s) who attempts to dominate, intimidate threaten, or control another person(s).

Bullying, as used in this study, making the victim uncomfortable, threatened, scared, belittled, or excluded by focusing on a certain weakness and exploiting that weakness in a repeated fashion, whether intentional or not.

Cyberbullying, as used in this study, a person(s), who by using electronic means such as

cell phones or the internet, attempts to harass, intimidate or threaten another
person(s).

Relational Bullying, as used in this study, the act of intimidating or harassing another
individual through exclusion, spreading rumors, ignoring, taunting, or any other
non-physical means.

School Administrator, as used in this study, an adult who by profession acts in a
supervisory capacity for teachers and students in a rural middle school setting.

School Culture, as used in this study, reflects the shared ideas—assumptions, values, and
beliefs—that give an organization its identity and standard for expected
behaviors (Tableman, 2004).

Victim, as used in this study, a person(s) who is intentionally made to feel controlled,
dominated, intimidated, threatened, or physically hurt by another person.

Zero-Tolerance policy, as used in this study, a school policy which states bullying will
not be allowed at any point in time by any person, on school grounds, field trips,
or any school related event.

<div align="center">Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions</div>

This study was delimited to teachers in five different, rural middle schools. Before
being selected, teachers stated that they had previous experiences with student bullying in
rural middle schools. Sampling was based upon the trustworthiness of the participants in
this regard, and there is no actual way outside of participant testimony to verify whether
or not they actually had these experiences.

The study was dependent on the involvement and the ability of the participants to
be familiar with student bullying in rural middle schools. Participants had varying

degrees of knowledge, experience, and data regarding their experience with student bullying in rural middle schools.

Participants, based upon individual school policy, had varying degrees of school and community influence in regard to bullying. There is no way to determine if bullying is more of a problem in any one school.

Because administrative permission was necessary to gain access to participants, principals and superintendents were informed of the study and its purpose. Teachers were aware that their administrators were familiar with the study. Their responses could have possibly been affected by concerns that administration would find out what teachers said in their interviews.

One factor to consider is that teachers might assume that they or their schools could be perceived as failures if they reported widespread problems with student bullying. To avoid a negative public perception of their school or their teaching, teachers may have been less compelled to reveal their true thoughts on some issues.

The five schools used in the study were comparable to other rural school settings. Schools which differ in size, location, or culture may produce different results. In addition, schools with different bullying policies or different levels of tolerance for bullying may also differ from the five schools represented in this study.

The study was based upon open-ended, interview questions through one-on-one interviews. It is possible that the questions themselves may have influenced responses and skewed the results of the study. To the best of my knowledge, participants were open and truthful, and offered honest answers to interview questions.

Dissertation Overview

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the problem and phenomenon to be studied. A statement of the problem is provided, along with the research questions and the significance of the study. A list of important definitions is provided, as well as the limitations, delimitations and assumptions of the study.

Chapter two introduces a review of the related literature which supported the need for the study. Topics addressed in the review include: (a) bullying, (b) middle-school bullying, (c) cyberbullying, (d) bullies, (e) victims of bullying, (f) long-term effects on victims, (g) bullying in rural schools, (h) school culture, (i) school policies, (j) teacher's role in recognizing bullying, (k) professional development, and (l) lack of qualitative research.

Chapter three includes the design and methodology used in the study including: (a) setting, (b) participants, (c) confidentiality, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, (f) trustworthiness, (g) credibility, (h) transferability, (i) dependability, and (j) confirmability.

Chapter four introduces the participants through individual case analysis. Each teacher who was interviewed is brought to life through his or her own specific story. Teachers' personal experiences with student bullying are discussed.

Chapter five includes analysis across cases (cross-case analysis) of the data and reveals the major findings of the study. The chapter is divided into three sections including teachers' experiences with student bullying, interventions, and professional development and participation in the development of policy.

Chapter six concludes the study. The first section addresses the implications of the study. The second section lists suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Students who have been identified as bullying victims experience many social,

psychological, and emotional difficulties (Blazer, 2005). Increased awareness of the

problems these students face, along with the fact that victims have sometimes been

known to violently react to continued victimization, has caused great concern in the

United States. This review will begin with studies about concerns over school violence in

the United States and the problem of bullying in middle schools, including cyberbullying.

Following the current issues with bullying, I will provide an examination of studies about

students who bully, victims of bullying, and the long-term effects on bullying victims.

Finally, I will examine the research: how school culture affects bullying, including the

need for and development of school bullying policy; the research on bullying in rural

schools; the research on teachers' roles and experiences with bullying and their need for

professional development; and the need for phenomenological qualitative research on

bullying.

Determining the Problem

As a result of school-related tragedies, school safety has become a top priority for

legislators, educators, administrators and parents in American schools. Three different

polls conducted since 2005 reveal American concerns about school safety. Glazer (2007)

analyzed school violence and found that national polls indicated much public concern. A

CNN/Gallup/*USA Today* national poll conducted after the 2005 Red Lake High School

shootings in Minnesota, in which nine people were killed including the gunman, revealed

that six of ten respondents believed similar shootings would happen again. The study also

cited an April, 1999 CBS News national poll conducted after the Columbine shootings in which respondents said they would like to see metal detectors in schools for increased security. A Gallup national poll conducted in March 2007 revealed that 80% of respondents were worried about crime and violence in schools.

Reports of school violence are alarming to parents, educators, and the public. The National Center for Education Statistics (2003) reported 71% of public school students in the U.S. experienced at least 1 violent incident during the 1999-2000 school year and 16 of them died as a result of school violence. As many as 261 U.S. students died as a result of school homicides between 1992 and 2002 (Salmans, 2007). In a 2003 national survey, 6% of students said they carried a weapon on school property (Salmans, 2007).

The *No Child Left Behind Act*, passed in 2001, made school safety a priority by including a "safe and drug-free schools and communities" clause in the legislation. The purpose of the clause is to support programs that prevent violence, drugs, alcohol and tobacco, and that foster strong parental involvement (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001). Actions by state legislatures are evidence of new initiatives to keep schools safe. Lewis (2007) reported that several states have initiated additional efforts to prevent school violence in the wake of the shooting incident at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia in April of 2007, in which more than 30 people were killed by a student. South Carolina state Senator Jeffrey D. Duncan introduced legislation which would allow adults to carry concealed handguns on college campuses in South Carolina. The Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents member Stavros S. Anthony also introduced legislation which would allow staff volunteers to serve as reserve police officers and carry weapons on college campuses. Other measures

taken by states to prevent school violence include tightening gun control laws and implementing task forces to investigate student behaviors (Lewis, 2007).

Perhaps due to strong emphasis on school safety and the strategies for prevention of violence at school, the most recent studies on school violence have indicated a decline in school violence. These results may indicate that increased awareness of the problem has been successful in addressing the problem. The National Center for Education Statistics (2007) reported a decline in non-fatal crime by 62% since 1992. Theft and violent crimes have also declined 65% and 54%, respectively. The trend continued between 2003 and 2004 as nonfatal crime declined 25%, and thefts declined 27%. In addition, "U.S. Report" (2008) cited information from the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention which reported a decline in school violence and student deaths. Between July 1999 and June 2006, there were fewer reported students deaths than there were in the 10 years prior.

<div align="center">Bullying</div>

Despite the fact that the most violent types of behaviors against students have declined in recent years, there is much evidence that bullying, a common form of school violence, occurs frequently throughout public schools in the United States. A study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has shown that more than 16% of school-age children have been bullied by other students (NICHHD, 2001). According to Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ruan, and Scheidt (2003) bullying and being bullied at school related to violent behaviors such as carrying weapons, fighting, and injuries stemming from fights. The objective of the Nansel et al. (2003) study was to

determine to what degree bullying and being bullied led to students becoming involved in violent behavior. Between 13% and 23% of boys and between 4% and 11% of girls said they were victims of bullying or they bullied others, or they became involved in violent behaviors such as carrying weapons on or off campus, fighting, and/or being injured in a physical fight. The odds of involvement in violent behavior were higher for students who bullied others than for those who were victims of bullying. Olweus (2001) defined bullying as being "exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students" (p. 6). According to a 2005 report from the National Center for Education Statistics, 28% of students said they had been bullied at school. Of the students who identified themselves as being bullied, 19% said other students had made fun of them, and 15% said other students had started rumors about them. Of the students who said they had experienced bullying, 79% said the bullying had taken place in school. Another 28% said the bullying had taken place on playgrounds or outside the school. More than half of the students, 53%, said they had been bullied at least once in the last 6 months, and 25% of those students reported having been bullied once per month. Perhaps most startling is the fact that 8% of the students reported being bullied daily (NCES, 2005).

Middle School Bullying

Bullying can be particularly prevalent in the middle grades. According to Banks (1997) bullying begins in elementary school, peaks in middle school, and dissipates in high school. In comparing middle schools and high schools, Maxwell (2006) found that middle school principals reported more incidences of bullying than elementary or high

school principals. Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, and Perry (2003) found that middle school students experienced bullying and peer harassment more frequently than high school students. Brown, Birch, and Kancherla (2005) reported finding that one in every ten middle-school students in the United States had been bullied at least once. The report also revealed that both bullies and victims were most often middle-school-age students. In a study by Harris and Petrie (2002) 92% of the middle school students surveyed said that they had witnessed bullying, and half of those students said that they did not report the bullying to anyone. In their study of bullying among middle-school students, Espelage and Holt (2001) discovered that teasing and bullying others granted bullies power and status in middle school with males identified as bullies more often than females. The absence of power and status can be troubling to adolescent students. According to Erikson (1970) adolescence is a critical age in which students are developing their individual identities. In addition, Marcia (1966) developed a stage theory of identity status in adolescence. Identity achievement is the stage in which an adolescent explores possible identities and makes a commitment to one. Identity diffusion refers to the stage in which a student has neither an identity crisis nor a commitment. Identity foreclosure refers to the stage in which a student has made a commitment without exploring other possible identities. Finally, the moratorium stage refers to the stage in which a student is in the process of exploring identities but has not made a commitment to one. Watchler (2005) also found that more relational types of bullying, such as name calling, were especially prevalent among middle-school students and that name calling may have caused students not to want to come to school or to lose self-confidence.

Several instances of bullying among middle-school students have had profound effects on the school districts associated with the events. A report by Bradley (2004) discussed an incident in which a middle-school student had been beaten on his ride home from school. The incident caused district administrators to install cameras on school buses. A similar report by Hurst (2004) examined a settlement with the parents of a Eugene, Oregon student who had been bullied repeatedly and then attacked on a school bus. The U.S. District Court held the district negligent in failing to address the bullying problem, which had led to the attack.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying, a new form of technological bullying, began to emerge with student access to instant and text messaging and to e-mail. Cyberbullying involves bullies who harass victims through electronic communication devices such as the internet or cell phones. Adolescent students are increasingly adept at using new technology to communicate with friends and parents. Technology allows students the opportunity to communicate with peers continuously, and their contacts may be friendly or unfriendly. A study by Stover (2006) reported cyberbullying to be a growing concern, especially in middle and high schools. The issue of anonymity or pseudoidentifiers makes this form of bullying particularly dangerous and hard to address. It is much easier for bullies to mask their identities through unsigned posts to online social networks. In addition, cyberbullying allows students to harass others not only during school hours but also after school and on weekends. In a study by Juvonen and Gross (2008) an anonymous web survey examined 1,454 students age 12-17. Seventy-two percent of respondents reported they had been bullied online at least once in the last year. Eighty-five percent of these

same students had also experienced bullying at school. Most of the online incidents involved name-calling or insults and typically took place through instant messaging. The study found that about two-thirds of the students knew the identities of the students who were bullying them online. About half of these students knew the bullies from school. Interestingly, 90% of the victims said they did not tell adults about the incidents. The consequences of these bullying incidents included social anxiety for the victims.

Electronic intimidation and bullying are new concepts with the full effects of these new threats on victims yet to be determined. Several studies related the importance and the danger of this growing problem among students. Stomfay-Stitz and Wheeler (2007) suggested that cyberbullying caused great emotional harm by targeting students who may be different or may be disliked due to a specific physical or social trait. The effects on students can be serious in that students' pre-teen egos may be damaged or harmed by this technology-based threat. Stover (2006) found that cyberbullying resembled relational bullying in the traditional, school setting in that students worked to gain approval of more popular students by excluding others. Jackson (2006) discussed bullying of students between the ages of 9 and 14, who used a variety of electronic devices to bully others, including computers, cell phones, and PDAs and said that intimidation and manipulation of peers using technology occurred more frequently. With the majority of incidents occurring off-campus, identification and punishment of bullies becomes much more difficult. A related article by Strom and Strom (2005) echoed this concern and reported finding that schools and school personnel were poorly prepared to deal with the problem of cyberbullying.

One cyberbullying incident which gained national media attention focused on the seriousness of the issue. Phoebe Prince was a 15-year-old student from South Hadley, Massachusetts who was the target of relentless physical, mental and electronic bullying. Through Facebook and text messages, she became a target for harassment by other students who have yet to be identified. The cyberbullying escalated into verbal and finally physical bullying which included one incident in which students threw an energy drink at her from a passing car as she was walking home from school. The same afternoon, she went home to her closet and hung herself. Law enforcement officials have subpoenaed Facebook records in the hopes of identifying the perpetrators and bringing them to justice. Phoebe's death is an example of how serious bullying can be, and how difficult it is for school and law enforcement officials to stop (Oliver, 2010).

<center>Bullies</center>

In order to understand how bullying affects students, it is important to understand why students bully other students. What follows is an overview of the current research on the act of bullying, what types of bullying occur in schools, and why the typical bully chooses to bully other students.

In seeking to define bullying, it is appropriate to recognize that bullying can be direct or indirect. According to Ahmad and Smith (1994) and Smith and Sharp (1994) direct or overt bullying can include hitting, teasing, threatening, or other physical types of harassment. Examples of indirect or relational bullying might include ignoring or leaving someone out of a group, or spreading rumors about another person. Cyberbullying may also fit into this category as students bully others more indirectly. Often boys tend to demonstrate more direct bullying behaviors, whereas girls tend to demonstrate more

indirect behaviors (Batche and Knoff, 1994; Nolin, Davies, and Chandler, 1995; Olweus, 1993; Whitney and Smith, 1993). A study by Lleras (2009) stated that overall students did not fear for their physical safety while at school. Astoundingly, the study reported that 70% of students experienced problems with disruptions in their classrooms, and 1 in every 5 students experienced "put-downs" by their peers. Even more surprising was that boys suffered more verbal harassment than girls. Whether the bullying is more physical or psychological, one of the key components of bullying is behavior that is repeated over time to the point of becoming a pattern (Batche and Knoff 1994; Olweus, 1993). In relation to direct or indirect forms of bullying, a repeated, direct pattern may occur when a student is repeatedly assaulted, teased or threatened to the point that the victim comes to expect the behavior. Indirect patterns may be exemplified by one student being constantly left out of a group or becoming the target of rumors; these patterns tend to increase to the point that the student becomes the natural target for such actions.

Several studies have examined the psychological and physical profiles of bullies and victims. According to a study by Brewster and Railsback (2001) students who act as bullies have a need to prove dominance over others by teasing, name calling or hurting others. A study by Shellard (2002) found that students who act as bullies often display aggressive tendencies toward peers or adults. These students often have little sympathy for students who are weaker or for those who they feel are inferior, and elicit pleasure from making others suffer.

Oliver, Hoover, and Hazier (1994) found that students who bully others often see their victims at least partly to blame due to their physical weakness and poor social skills. Contrary to some beliefs, bullies often have good self-esteem and are generally popular

with teachers and other students. According to Cohn and Canter (2003) students often bully others in an attempt to win respect or to experience rewards from their peers for their behavior.

Some studies have shown that bullies come from homes where corporal punishment is an accepted form of discipline, and the behavior can be generational. Often bullies come from homes where parents are not as involved in their children's lives, and the atmosphere is not conducive to caring. Often students who are seen as demonstrating bullying behaviors at school are victimized at home (Batche, 1999; Batche and Knoff, 1994; Olweus, 1993).

Students who act as bullies at school often continue their behavior through adulthood sometimes resulting in criminal activity. According to Olweus (1993) students who acted as bullies continued their harassing behavior into adulthood, and as many as 60% of students who acted as bullies in their middle-school years were convicted as a criminal by their early twenties.

Victims of Bullying

To understand what it means to be a victim of bullying, it is necessary to define what a victim is, and how students become bully victims. A review of the current research revealed much information related to victimization. Ericson (2001) reported that bully victims often experienced a lack of success in school due to the inability to concentrate on schoolwork. In addition, the report found that victims were frequently absent, were at risk for dropping out of school, felt lonely, had difficulty making friends, experienced low self-esteem, and had a fear of school.

An examination of victims' psychological make-up reveals these students often have trouble with social identity and may not possess a strong physical stature. Students who are victims of bullying are often very insecure about themselves (Blazer, 2005). They suffer from very low self-esteem and are reluctant to defend themselves against aggressors. They generally do not find themselves as members of peer groups and are often alone and isolated with very few friends. Often bullying victims avoid restrooms and other isolated areas at school for fear of being bullied (Blazer, 2005). Victims often tend to stay close to their parents, whom they see as protectors. Victims tend to be physically weaker than aggressors (Batche and Knoff, 1994; Olweus, 1993). According to Shellard (2002) and Kreidler (1996) the idea that students were bullied because of their physical appearance was not supported in the research. For example, students were not bullied exclusively because they wore glasses, were overweight, or wore different clothing. In considering differences among race, DeVoe, Peter, Kaufman, Miller, Noonan, Snyder, and Baum (2004) found that White students were slightly more likely than Black or Hispanic students to report being bullied. Also, rural students were more likely than urban or suburban students to report being bullied (Blazer, 2005).

Bully victims often have trouble with recess or at times when supervision is less structured. A study by Whitney and Smith (1993) involving middle school students found that schools with high bullying rates tended to have students who were alone at playtime or disliked playtime altogether. Isolation or unwillingness to play with other students is cause for alarm due to the lack of interaction with peers who may serve as social supports. A similar study by Wolke, Woods, Stanford, and Schulz (2001) found that most bullying incidents occurred on the playground. According to Banks (1997) students who

were victims of bullying at school were unhappy and did not consider school to be a place where they could become happy.

A study by Smith, Talamelli, and Cowie (2004) examined bullying among students in grades seven and nine in Great Britain. Two distinct types of bully victims emerged from the study, *escaped victims* and *continuing victims*. *Escaped victims* were students who were no longer victims of bullying and were not tremendously different from students who had not been victimized at all, with the exception that they often had difficulties with peer relationships. A second type of victim, *continuing victims,* disliked certain aspects of school such as playtime, had fewer friends at school, were absent from school more often, and were more likely to be victims over time or to exhibit bully-type behavior themselves.

Perhaps one of the most disturbing problems associated with victimization is that students, once they become targets of bullying, almost always continue to be victims. Research has indicated that non-aggressive students who were victimized by bullying in junior high school remained victims due to the fact that the bullying became institutionalized (Coie, Dodge, and Kupersmidt, 1990; Evans and Eder, 1993; Kinney, 1993; Merton, 1996). In other words, it became accepted practice for all students to pick on or bully these students. The only successful strategy identified to help these students was a change of environment such as changing schools or classrooms. However, these changes were not always successful. Merton (1996) focused on students who had attempted to make changes in their status by exhibiting different behaviors. Although these students perceived their changes to make a difference in their status, peer interviews revealed no real difference in the social status of these students.

A study by Poteat and Espelage (2007) reported that students who were targets of homophobic victimization experienced many psychological and social effects, with the effects differing for males and females. Males were less likely to experience a sense of belonging to the school and experienced greater personal distress. Females often experienced significant withdrawal from school and other social situations. In addition, Dellasega and Adamshick (2005) reported that girls who were victims of relational aggression experienced negative impact on self-esteem, peer relationships, school performance, and mental and physical health.

A study by Peterson and Ray (2006) examined how bully victims felt about their victimization. The study reported that students suffered alone, feeling they were unable to confide in anyone; did not fully understand what bullying was or why they were being bullied; assumed it was up to them to stop being bullied; were likely to suffer from despair from being bullied; and had a tendency to think violent thoughts. Students also felt that by not being popular they were a target for bullying. The study examined how victims who were gifted students were able to make sense of why they were being bullied, and in some cases, to put a stop to being bullied.

In some cases, being bullied resulted in death. A study by Kim, Koh, and Leventhal (2005) reported that students who were victims of bullying were more at risk for suicidal behavior than students who were not involved in bullying. A similar study by Klomek, Marrocco, and Kleinman (2007) found that students who were frequently exposed to victimization or bullying were at high risk of depression and suicide attempts. In addition, students who were only marginally exposed to victimization or bullying were still at high risk for depression and suicide.

In addition to emotional and psychological problems, some studies have suggested that bully victims also experienced physical problems. A study by Gruber and Fineran (2007) examined the effects of being bullied on high-school and middle- school girls. The study reported that students who were victims of bullying and sexual harassment also experienced poorer health outcomes. Nudo (2004) found that students who were victims of bullying could experience a wide variety of health problems, including headaches, stomach aches, and difficulty sleeping. These students were often unable to concentrate at school, which led to failing grades and poor achievement.

Victims of bullying often experience problems in dealing with aggression, forming and sustaining relationships, and have been shown to have problems with substance abuse. A study by Rusby, Forrester, Biglan, and Metzler (2005) reported finding that students who were victims of peer harassment in middle school exhibited greater problem behavior such as aggressive and antisocial behavior and use of cigarettes and alcohol. A study by "Depression" (2004) connected bullying to substance abuse and depression among middle-school students.

A study by Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, and Perry (2003) revealed that students who were victims of peer harassment often missed out on educational and social opportunities because they did not want to go to school. These missed opportunities might have caused students trouble while they were in school and might have continued to adversely affect them in adulthood. Parault, Davis, and Pellegrini (2007) found that students who were victims of bullying were more likely to miss social opportunities such as school dances. Researchers used dance attendance rates and the presence of those students who were identified as bullies by their peers to determine how frequently

students identified as victims attended dances in two different schools. Students identified as victims were more likely to attend dances in the school where fewer bullies attended the dances. Nishina, Juvonen, and Witkow (2005) reported that bullying could cause problems which could ruin the entire school year for students. Students who were victims in the fall showed signs of social and physical problems, which resulted in decreased student achievement in the spring. The study found that the problems associated with peer victimization were not limited to sex or ethnicity but were consistent across the sample.

Long-Term Effects on Victims

Victims of bullying tend to continue their patterns of behavior into adulthood. While in school, victims often accumulate excessive absences from school due to isolation from friends and classmates. The social ostracism experienced by victims often leads to depression and extreme anxiety throughout their lives (Batche and Knoff, 1994; Olweus, 1993). According to Blazer (2005) "Bullying is now known to have long-term academic, physical, and emotion effects on both the victim and the bully" (p.1).

Many of the problems victims face in school follow them into adulthood where they experience depression and other mental health issues (Blazer, 2005). Several studies have found that middle and high school victims of bullying experience high levels of anxiety and depression, low self-esteem, anger, and sadness (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, and Gowen, 2001; Espelage and Holt, 2007; Salmon, James and Smith, 1998; Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagle, and Mickelson, 2001). In addition, Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) reported finding that students who experienced childhood bullying suffered long- term, adult mental problems such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and conduct

disorders. Holt, Finkelhor, and Kantor (2007) found that bully victims were at an increased risk of conventional crime, child maltreatment, sexual victimization, and witnessing or indirect victimization. These types of victimization can have lasting psychological effects on students. The study also showed that bully victims were more likely to internalize problems, which could lead to physical health issues as well as emotional problems in adulthood.

Jantzew, Hoover, and Narloch, (2006) discovered a positive correlation between students who were victims of bullying in school and shyness, mistrust, and initiating friendships in adulthood. Graham, Bellmore, and Mize (2006) suggested that victims of bullying often experienced self-blame for their victimization, experienced psychological maladjustment due to their victimization, and had a negative self- perception.

According to Felix and McMahon (2007) middle-school students who had been victimized became more accepting of aggressive behavior. In addition, Gamliel, Hoover, Daughtry, and Imbra (2003) reported finding that chronic victims of bullying became ineffective in dealing with aggression.

<center>Bullying in Rural Schools</center>

Bullying was not always seen as a common problem in rural schools. A qualitative study by Quinn (1993) examined the sense of belonging, experienced by rural students during the first part of the twentieth century. In one-room rural schoolhouses, students felt safe, and violence and bullying were foreign notions that were largely unreported. The students interviewed reported a closeness in which younger students learned from older ones, and everyone helped each other. The sense of belonging

appeared to inspire a kinship similar to an extended family in which everyone's needs were important.

Sadly, a different picture now emerges from the rural research. A study by Bowman (2001) found that approximately 30% of students in the rural Midwest either bullied other students or had been bullied sometime between the sixth and tenth grades. A study by Dulmus, Theriot, Sowers, and Blackburn (2004) found that more than 82% of students interviewed had experienced bullying. The figures reported in the study were higher than those reported in other U.S. studies and may indicate that bullying is a bigger problem in rural areas than in urban or suburban areas. The authors called for additional research into bullying in rural areas. In Texas, a rural school study by Schroth and Fishbaugh (2000) found that more than half of the boys and at least one-fifth of the girls had been involved in a fight that included the use of weapons. The National School Board Association found that 69% of rural schools reported fights and assaults on a regular basis (Bachus, 1994). A study of rural school counselors found that 59% of the counselors felt safety was becoming a major issue in their schools. Counselors rated bullying at 2.36 as a problem for their schools, with 1 representing behaviors that were not a problem and 4 representing behaviors that were a serious problem (Srebalus and David, 1996). The results of the survey indicated that school counselors felt as though bullying was a problem in their rural schools.

Hektner and Swenson (2006) in examining the problem of bullying in rural schools, studied more than 300 students in rural Minnesota to see how often students were bullied and to determine which behaviors were indicative of future bullying. The study found that almost half of the students responding had been victims of bullying.

Only 16% said they had bullied others. Ironically, an overwhelming majority of students who identified themselves as bullies (82%) reported that they had also been victims.

A study by Patterson, Ramsey, and Womack (2005) examined student perceptions of how serious the bullying problem was in their school. The authors compared middle-school student responses within a rural Arkansas school district. With more than half of the students reporting that they had been bullied, mental or emotional bullying was reported as more prevalent than physical bullying. Isernhagen and Harris (2004) examined bullying in rural high schools and middle schools. Their study found that 22% of the students interviewed said that bullying happened often in their school, and 70% said it happened sometimes. In addition, 17% of the students said that they were bullied at least once per week. Although 38% said bullying did not affect them greatly, more than 10% said being bullied made them feel bad. In addition, more than 88% said bullying made them angry. These studies concluded that bullying was a real problem in rural schools and that some students suffered because of it.

Harris' and Isernhagen's study (2003) examined rural students in Nebraska and Texas and found that nearly 75% of the students reported having been bullied at school. Girls reported more teasing and name calling, whereas boys reported more physical forms of bullying. Perhaps most disturbing was a reoccurring problem revealed in similar non-rural studies in which students reported feeling that they could not tell school personnel about the problem. "Neither boys nor girls are telling school faculty about the bullying, nor do they have the perception that school faculty are interested in trying to stop bullying on their campus" (Harris and Isernhagen, 2003, p.19). In continuing with the trend, a study by Stockdale, Hangaduambo, and Duys (2002) found that students and

teachers differed in their perceptions of the prevalence of bullying in schools. The study examined rural students in fourth through sixth grade, along with their teachers and found that students, more often than school personnel, reported incidences of bullying. The study linked bullying in schools to cultures tolerant of aggression and suggested such a culture was common in rural schools. If aggression was accepted or not defined as particularly harmful, in many cases it was overlooked or at least underemphasized. A similar case study of a rural school by DeLara (2000) examined student perceptions of safety at school. The study found that students questioned whether adults in the school truly cared about them and felt that school personnel were unaware of the amount of bullying going on in the school. Students felt that there should be more adult presence in the school in order to maintain order and keep them safe. Students described various kinds of bullying that affected them in particular, including teasing, sexual harassment by fellow students, and verbal intimidation by their teachers. Students expressed feeling the need for belonging in the schools and suggested moral and character education as a vehicle for achieving these ideals.

Bowles and Lesperance (2004) interviewed middle school students in rural Nevada to determine the ways in which students experienced the problem of bullying, and how they in turn coped with these problems. The researchers found that students had difficulty with any kind of human connections due to being bullied and that they expressed pain and alienation from family, peers, and teachers. In addition, their research found that students suffered a loss of a sense of self and personal power. Although the students under study were very good at inventing ways in which to deal with being

bullied, the strategies the students used may have further alienated them from others in a time when they needed personal connections with peers and family members.

School Culture

The presence of a positive school culture is important to student success. According to Beane (2003) schools should continually strive to create an environment of high expectations, so that students feel safe and can be influenced by positive adult role models through a learning community. Several studies have examined how the culture of the school contributes to bullying and victimization. A study by Williams and Cornell (2006) reported finding that students who felt they were in a school which was tolerant of physical aggression were less likely to seek help from adults. The study suggested that students felt they had nowhere to turn when they were victimized. A similar study by Unnever and Cornell (2004) revealed that victims in schools where bullying was tolerated or whose parents used coercive discipline were less likely to report being bullied. Watchler (2005) stated that less violent occurrences of bullying, such as name calling, could lead to a school climate in which children disliked coming to school. Students in this environment can become frustrated or disheartened and can lose self-confidence, which can make them not want to participate at all.

If the prevailing attitude in a school is that teasing or other non-physical forms of bullying are not serious, students who experience these kinds of bullying may feel that they have no alternative but to suffer through the harassment alone. Newman and Murray (2005) discussed student reluctance to tell adults about being bullied. In their study, students reported teasing to be as serious as physical acts of bullying and reported fearing that, if they told someone about the bullying, the problem would become worse. In a

study by Thornton (2002) students perceived violence as a part of the main school culture. The study examined four southern middle schools and found teacher views of school violence to be different from those of their students. Whereas teachers felt that school violence was caused by factors outside of school, students felt as though students were permitted and even encouraged to be cruel to one another. A similar study by San Antonio and Salzfass (2007) found that students felt that teachers were not aware of the bullying problems students faced and were thus not interested in helping them.

<div align="center">School Policies</div>

According to Beane (2000) students suffered academic difficulty if their minds were preoccupied with safety issues. Olweus (1995) stressed the importance of developing an orderly school environment which was free from humiliation and harm. The development of successful anti-bullying policies has shown to be effective in reducing bullying incidents at school by more than 50% in the United States (Fitzgerald, 2003).

Just as educators in America are struggling to deal with the problems associated with bullying, so are other nations. According to Samara and Smith (2008) anti-bullying policies are requirements in the United Kingdom. The effects of these legal requirements have caused many schools to rethink how they deal with the issue of bullying and the policies they develop to address it. Schools are moving from traditional bullying policies, which are a part of a larger discipline policy aimed at punishing bullying-type behavior, to a separate anti-bullying policy aimed at changing specific interventions schools use to address bullying. In a related article, Smith, Smith, and Osborn (2008) studied the specifics of these anti-bullying policies and found that most of them addressed issues

such as improving school climate, identifying specific types of bullying, including physical, verbal, and relational forms of bullying, and developing procedures for the purpose of notifying parents when incidents occur. Most policies, however, failed to address important issues such as responsibilities of school staff other than teachers, follow-up after incidents occurred, and specific preventative steps in less supervised areas such as the playground. In addition, there was little difference between primary and secondary schools' policies, and cyberbullying and homophobic bullying were seldom mentioned. Osher, VanAcker, and Morrison (2004) stated that most schools' anti-bullying policies addressed bullying with disciplinary consequences designed to reduce the probability that the behavior would happen again. Current research, however, reveals the need to explore the social context of bullying behavior in order to provide community, school, family, and peer interaction aimed at curbing the undesired behavior. The article stated the need for functional behavioral assessment to identify behavioral triggers related to certain social issues in the school and classroom.

Another less supervised area with the potential for bullying behaviors is the school bus. According to Harrison (2005) many schools across the United States are addressing the issue of bullying on the school bus in their school anti-bullying policies. Because drivers are busy driving the school bus, they often are unable to see pushing, shoving and other forms of bullying and harassment which take place on the school bus. Some districts have addressed bullying on buses through the use of video cameras and/or bus monitors, both of which can be expensive. The study related the need for more training for bus drivers so that they are better able to intervene and stop harassment. The

study also asserted that drivers should be trained on how to report problems and should receive follow-up after the reporting has occurred.

In the United States, many states also require local school boards to develop policies to address bullying in schools. Connecticut is one state that adopted such a mandate in 2002. LaRocco, Nestler-Rusack, and Freiberg (2007) examined the experiences districts had with implementation of these policies, issues of school climate during implementation, the anti-bullying programs and curricula used in schools, and the required professional development educators needed for successful implementation. The study found that only half of the districts studied had implemented all of the policy elements required by Connecticut state law. More telling was the fact that no single requirement was reported by all the districts. The conclusions drawn from the study were that policy effectiveness was decidedly related to the importance of reflection, analysis and decision making during the implementation phase. According to the Montana Healthy Schools Network (2005) it was the responsibility of school boards, administrators and staff to ensure a safe environment for all students. The authors stated that, in order to prevent bullying, intimidation, and harassment, schools had to develop specific policies which addressed these issues. Only through proper policy development could schools ensure a safe environment where teaching and learning took place.

Policy development must be a thoughtful process. A hastily constructed policy without solid goals and objectives may be less effective and may not address the problems at all. A study by Eslea and Smith (1998) examined four schools after the implementation of an anti-bullying project in Sheffield, England. Results for two of the schools indicated a decline in the number of bullying incidences after the program was

implemented. One school experienced a decline and then a rise in the number of bullying incidents, and the fourth school experienced a rise. Among boys, all four schools experienced a decline in the number of bullying incidents. However, three of the four schools experienced a rise in the number of bullying incidents involving girls. This may have indicated that the anti-bullying program addressed issues of male bullying but not female-type bullying. In addition, the study asserted that school personnel, especially teachers, should be involved in the development of anti- bullying policies. According to Druck and Kaplowitz (2005) many teachers remained frustrated with their schools' policies on school violence. Prevention programs and curricula are often chosen with very little input from teachers, even though teachers are ultimately responsible for the implementation and success of the program. According to Glover, Cartwright, and Gough (1998) schools that have implemented anti-bullying policies might experience problems associated with interpretation of the policy and the context in which bullying occurs.

<div align="center">Teacher Roles in Recognizing Bullying</div>

Teachers play an important role in recognizing bullying in schools. According to Dake, Price, Telljohann, and Funk (2003) the amount of time teachers spent with students allowed them the opportunity to address bullying and the problems victims face in school. Through better supervision during recess, forming bullying prevention groups, scheduling parent-teacher conferences, discussing classroom rules and procedures with students, and talking with victims and bullies as well as their parents, teachers can promote awareness of bullying and hope to stop bullying behaviors. Teacher perceptions of bullying represent an important part in recognizing bullying behavior. According to Borg (1998) teachers considered bullying to be second only to drug use when examining

serious student behaviors. When rating the most serious kinds of bullying, not surprisingly, teachers said physical bullying was the worst type of bullying behavior, followed by verbal and social bullying (Boulton, 1997; Hazier, Miller, Carney, and Green, 2001). According to a study by Boulton (1997) teachers had negative reactions to bullying behavior and felt sympathy for bullying victims. The same study reported finding that 98.6% of teachers felt responsible for stopping bully-type behavior but didn't have the necessary training to do so.

Teachers seem to indicate that both bullies and their victims often suffer from a lack of social skills. A study by Larke and Beran (2006) suggested that students who bullied others lacked the social skills to effectively manage interpersonal relationships. Teachers rated students' social skills and found that social skills were inversely related to both physical and indirect bullying. In addition, when asked to observe students who were both bullies and victims, teachers reported finding in non-bullied children the presence of social skills such as sensitivity to the feelings of others, a greater ability to control their own feelings, and less selfish behavior in (Lowenstein, 1978). The study also stated that non-victims were able to participate in activities with other students and were not overly aggressive or demanding.

In comparing teacher and student perceptions of prevention strategies in schools, Crothers and Kolbert (2004) reported that teachers were more likely to rate programs as effective and to say that teachers offered students more assistance with bullying problems. The report also stated that both teachers and students agreed that strategies used in many current bully-prevention programs were not very helpful.

Professional Development

Teachers have the task of dealing with problems associated with student bullying on a day-to-day basis. Frequently, teachers see students more than any other adults, allowing them the opportunity to witness problems associated with student bullying. A study by Benitez, Garcia-Berben, and Fernandez-Cabezas (2009) stated the importance of professional training for teachers for dealing with student bullying. According to the authors, although bullying affects teachers directly, teachers receive little preparation on how to deal with bullying incidents in the school or classroom. The authors suggested the need for specific content training during teachers' college preparation in order to better deal with problems associated with student bullying.

The study examined how a specific content course on bullying affected future teachers' general understanding and attitudes towards the problem of bullying. The results of the study showed a statistically significant improvement in the teachers' ability to characterize bullying problems and to determine the difference between victims and aggressors, the teachers' strategies for dealing with the problem, and the teachers' confidence to be able to deal with the problem effectively. The study showed the positive impact of specific training on the teachers' ability to deal with bullying and underscored the need for such training for teachers.

Professional development is essential for not only teachers, but also principals. According to a study completed by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (2008) teachers felt a supportive principal was one of the essential keys to developing a more tolerant school climate. The study stated that many principals need training in order to be effective in the way they dealt with lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT)

student problems. The study further said that, as a result of their lack of professional development, principals often underestimated the problems associated with the bullying of LGBT students.

Recent research has outlined various strategies which have been shown to be effective in dealing with student bullying. Rigby (2001) suggested the importance of professional development for schools in the development of strategies used to stop student bullying. The author stressed the need to deal constructively rather than negatively with students and to support victims of bullying at school. Also discussed was the need for teachers and parents to work together to stop bullying by communication between the home and the school. The author states an importance to educate the community about the problems associated with student bullying and to develop an effective, anti-bullying policy.

A study by Adamski and Ryan (2008) revealed important intervention strategies that address student bullying. The study outlined role-playing, journal writing, open discussions, and team building activities to promote positive social interaction among students. The study found that students who were given these tools and strategies became empowered which seemed to make them stronger in terms of dealing with student bullies. This type of training was usually associated more with school counselors than with teachers but could prove to be very valuable to teachers, who spend more time with students than almost anyone else. Training teachers to help students by giving them these strategies is an important step toward addressing the problems associated with student bullying.

Rowan (2007) outlined the importance of solid classroom management skills for teachers as an effective way of dealing with student bullying. The study suggested a need for teacher preparation programs, new teacher induction and more professional development with the goal of helping teachers to develop better classroom management skills. The author suggested that, by acquiring better classroom management techniques, teachers would be better able to create positive and productive environment in their classrooms. Positive and productive classroom environments allow students the freedom to feel safe and provide them with the ability to become more successful both academically and socially. The study suggested that bullying might be greatly reduced or prevented with the implementation of better classroom management skills.

Barton (2003) asserted that social skills, assertiveness, and conflict resolution were three successful methods with which to address bully-type behavior. She listed the need for training for teachers in school-wide, anti-bullying programs, classroom management, and intervention strategies designed to help teachers and school leadership make schools safer.

Mueller and Parisi (2002) related the importance of communication, the development of a framework, intervention, and assessment in addressing issues with student bullying. In the study, two separate interventions were implemented with the goal of making teachers more aware of bullying in the school, as well as training teachers how to deal with bullying by responding appropriately to bully-type behavior and being able to diffuse altercations. In addition, the program also implemented conflict resolution, role-playing, the use of discussion groups, and response training. The training provided

for the teachers resulted in a decreased number of bullying incidents and a better student awareness of the harmful effects of bullying.

According to Bickmore (1997) school leaders including teachers often addressed bullying and school violence with the aim of avoidance rather than problem solving. The author referred to this practice as "negative peacemaking" which called for settling conflicts before the underlying problems had been solved or even understood. Further, the author said that violence prevention and anti-bullying programs were too narrowly focused and only dealt with social skills and anger management. The author stated that student governance activities allowed students the opportunity to participate in democratic decision making and helped develop an understanding of conflict and its resolution. The author suggested that controversial subject matter had the potential to be damaging to students without proper sensitivity by the teacher to the needs of all students, but could also allow students who did not always participate in discussion to take part and to voice their opinions. The author suggests the infusing of conflict resolution and conflict management into everyday instruction as a means of allowing students to participate in conflict management as citizens of our democracy.

Lack of Qualitative Research

According to Bowles and Lesperance (2004) there was a lack of qualitative research related to bullying and being bullied. This was despite the fact that a number of studies had been done from the victim-only point of view. Qualitative interviews can provide the information necessary for researchers and practitioners to develop successful strategies and interventions to help victims of bullying. Qualitative studies can provide better insight into the problems bully victims face, the coping strategies these students

use, and what behaviors, if any, the victims exhibit which may lead to their being bullied. According to Prinstein, Boergers, and Vernberg (2001) students who were bullies have been studied much more frequently than students who were victims. In addition, Owens, Shute, and Slee, (2000) reported their finding that there was little qualitative research on victims', parents', or teachers' experiences. Faye (2004) explained the importance of adults listening to children and being able to recognize how their students felt and thought about bullying. If adults are not aware of what students are trying to tell them, students may stop trying to communicate with them. The fact that teachers and school personnel do not always recognize bullying suggests that more research is necessary in order to better inform adults about the problems bully victims face.

In summary, violence in schools remains a concern in the United States even though statistics indicate a decrease in violent crimes in schools. In particular, the research indicates as much as 90% of students in middle school have been victims of bullying at some point in their school career (Hoover and Oliver, 1996). Bullying takes on many forms, including physical violence, verbal aggression, social isolation, and in recent years, electronic intimidation called *cyberbullying*.

The research indicates that students who bully others have a desire to dominate others, and are frequently victimized at home. Victims of bullying are often withdrawn, may or may not feel as though they brought the bullying on themselves, and carry long-term effects, such as anxiety and depression, into adulthood where they have problems with relationships and trust.

In order to better understand student bullying in rural middle schools, it is necessary to identify the gaps in the existing research. The purpose of this study was to seek qualitative data which would add to the existing knowledge base in the area of student bullying. One identified gap is in the research on bullying in rural schools. More research is needed on bullying in rural schools in order to better understand if and how much the rural environment impacts bullying in these schools. This study was conducted in five rural middle schools with the intent to gain a more clear understanding of the bullying phenomenon as it related to rural schools.

The existing research also reveals a lack of qualitative studies on bullying as a whole. Although a great deal of quantitative research has been conducted on students who bully, considerably less research has been done with victims, and very little research has been aimed at understanding teachers' perspectives and thoughts. The main purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of student bullying through the experiences of teachers. Teachers play an important role in recognizing bullying in schools. The information gathered from open-ended interviews with teachers can better aid researchers and educators in understanding the phenomenon of bullying in rural middle schools.

CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to better understand teachers' experiences with student bullying in five rural middle schools. This was a qualitative study using open-ended interviews to explore rural middle school teachers' experiences. Originally, I was interested in interviewing student victims of bullying to learn more about middle school bullying from the victim's point of view. After discussing my intent with several fellow school administrators, I realized I would have difficulty interviewing students because of the potential risk of upsetting victims who would have been asked to relive traumatic experiences from their past. I decided to interview teachers because they are the adults most likely to witness student bullying on a first-hand basis. Based on this fact, teachers have direct observational insight into the problems associated with student bullying. While it is ethically problematic to ask victims to talk about their experiences as bullies and victims, teachers make ideal participants for this study because they interact with students and witness bullying first-hand and are thus able to provide much insight into this topic.

According to Moustakas (as cited in Creswell, 1998) a phenomenological study "describes the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon (or topic or concept) for several individuals" (p. 236). In this type of qualitative method, the researcher reduces the experiences to a central meaning or the essence of the experience. A phenomenological design was appropriate because it allowed me as the researcher the opportunity to gain insight into the phenomenon of bullying through interviews conducted with those adults who have witnessed firsthand incidents of student bullying behavior in rural middle

schools, and who have responsibility for recognizing, reporting and intervening in incidents of bullying.

Setting

This study was conducted in five rural middle schools in North Carolina. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2006) a rural school is a school which is located in a rural area, classified as "fringe," "distant," or "remote." A fringe area is classified as an area less than or equal to five miles from an urbanized area. A distant area is classified as an area which is less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area. A remote area is classified as an area which is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area. Areas with a population of 50,000 or more are categorized as urban areas.

Teachers were chosen from five different middle schools in the southern Appalachian region, all classified as rural. According to the North Carolina School Report Card (2010) the schools ranged between 300 and 900 students in grades 5, 6, 7, and 8. Class sizes ranged from slightly below to slightly above the state average of 21 in grades 6 and 7, and 20 in grade 8. The number of teachers ranged from 22 to 58 as compared to the state average of 46. The number of teachers categorized as highly qualified ranged between 98% and 100%, as compared to the state average of 91%. Teacher turnover rates averaged between 8% and 28% as compared to the state average of 24%. Two of the schools represented the only middle school in their respective districts. Two of the other three schools in the study were in the same district and were the only two middle schools in that district. The fifth middle school was one of many middle schools in the district.

Among the schools, disciplinary referrals and attendance were comparable to state averages, with one school slightly higher than the state average in the number of acts of crime or violence. No long-term suspensions or expulsions were reported in any of the schools represented in the study. School attendance in the three schools averaged between 93% and 95% of students reporting to school daily, which was consistent with the state average of 95%.

These particular middle schools were chosen for a number of reasons. First, all of the schools qualified as average middle schools in North Carolina, meeting all indicators including school and class size, number of teachers, teacher turnover, and student disciplinary and attendance rates in comparison to other middle schools across the state. Second, the schools met the definition of a rural middle school as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (2006). In addition, school administrators supported the need for the study, acknowledged the fact that there was a bullying issue in the school, and welcomed any information and/or interventions that could help.

Participants

Participants were middle-school teachers chosen using a criterion-based sampling method to ensure the sample included teachers who had witnessed acts of bullying in their respective schools. A total of 13 teachers participated in the study. The data retrieved from interviews with these teachers indicated a rich, saturated study.

Preliminary conversations were held with school administrators prior to approaching teachers. The purpose of these preliminary conversations was to explain the study and to seek permission to survey and interview the teachers. School administrators

were asked to support the study and to help explain the benefits of the study to the teachers.

After discussing the study with school administrators, I contacted each certified teacher at the five middle schools via e-mail. I introduced myself and informed them that I had already spoken to their respective principals and superintendents. I asked for voluntary participation and told them I would leave necessary forms in their mailboxes at school.

Next, I visited each school and left a packet in each teacher's mailbox, which included an introductory letter explaining the study and its intent, an informed consent form, and directions for the form, should they agree to participate. In one school, I was granted the opportunity to speak with the faculty and tell them about the study. I left with each school's receptionist an envelope, which contained an introductory letter, an informed consent form, and information on how to contact me. I explained to the receptionists that I would return in three to five days to pick the envelope up. In the letter, I told teachers that their involvement in the project would involve answering a series of interview questions about their experiences with student bullying. I told them that, if they had not had any experiences with student bullying, they should not participate in the study. I also told them that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could discontinue their involvement at any time.

Once teachers were identified and had agreed to participate in the study, I made a phone call to each one and explained the study, the purpose, risks, and safeguards. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form agreeing to participate in the study. The form explained to them that they had the right to discontinue their

participation in the study at any time. Administrator and teacher participation was voluntary with no pressure to participate.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study with participants made aware of this policy prior to being interviewed. Because the forms were returned to the receptionists, only the receptionists, the principals, and I had the possibility of knowing which teachers participated in the study. After selection of the participants, each teacher was assigned a letter name which served as his or her only identifier. During the final analysis phase, letter names were changed to pseudonyms for the remainder of the study. Recordings, transcripts and notes identify teachers only by letter name or pseudonym and will be destroyed five years after completion of the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected through audio recordings of interviews with individual teachers in a private setting either at their respective school or another neutral site such as a college library, university education building, or another school setting. The purpose of conducting interviews was to examine teachers' experiences with student bullying in rural middle schools. The interviews provided data about their experiences in their own words. I took notes during the interviews to supplement the recordings. Confidentiality was observed in all sessions and with all participants. Each teacher was interviewed once.

Interviews were recorded using a microcassette recorder. Examples of questions I asked teachers during the interview sessions can be found in the interview guide located in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

The process of analyzing the data was ongoing. Data were analyzed using a method described in Patton (1980) which included data reduction, unitization, categorization, and verification. Taped interviews were transcribed verbatim. During each interview, I took notes which reflected important statements for the purpose of addressing interview prompts which had been predetermined prior to the sessions. After the second participant was interviewed, I started the analysis process by extracting similar statements. I continued this process throughout the remaining interviews, which allowed me to analyze data throughout the study. Notations, audio recordings, and transcriptions were kept in a separate folder for each individual participant. This represented a written record of the analysis.

I began analyzing the data by reading and examining participant responses in each interview in order to gain a sense of the whole interview. After reading, I transcribed each interview from an audio recording onto a Word document. I then sent an electronic copy of each participant's individual interview to him or her via e-mail. I asked the participants to read the interview and to let me know if they found inaccuracies in the text. I asked them to send a return e-mail stating that they found the transcriptions to be accurate.

After the transcriptions were checked for accuracy, I began to extract sections of information from each interview, which directly related to the five original research questions: What kind of experiences have teachers had with student bullying in rural middle schools? How have these teachers handled these experiences? What interventions do teachers find effective and ineffective in addressing bullying in rural middle schools?

What kinds of training have teachers had in regard to bullying? And what roles do teachers play in developing anti-bully policies and practices in rural middle schools? In essence, how did each participant answer the research questions? After categorizing the sections of teacher responses, I then divided the information into three domains: Teachers' Experiences with Student Bullying, Interventions, and Professional Development and Participation in the Development of Policy. At this point I began to use the inductive analysis approach with the first step of data reduction. In order to gain a sense of each teachers' experience, I used case analysis as described by Patton (2002) and developed a teacher story for each participant.

The second step of the process involved data reduction by unitization. From the teacher stories derived from the transcripts, common themes emerged. The third step was cross-case analysis in which each of the three domains was reduced to common themes based upon teacher responses. These broad section areas included three domains. Domain one included: (a) dimensions of bullying, (b) discrimination and harassment, (c) adolescent behavior and development, (d) the secrecy of bullying, and (e) teachers' personal reflections. Domain two included: (a) teacher interventions, beliefs, and actions; (b) trusting relationship; (c) consultation with counseling services; (d) small-group and classroom interventions; (e) character education; (f) involving others; and (g) unsure how to handle the situation. Domain three included: (a) professional development teachers have experienced, (b) absence of professional development, and (c) teacher involvement in the development of policy.

After dividing the subjects into each domain, I reorganized the data and combined some subjects in order to give a clearer picture of the data. Continuing with the analysis

process, I then divided each of the sections into common categories that emerged from the data. Some examples of the categories include: dimensions of bullying in Domain One, trusting relationship in Domain Two, and professional development and participation in the development of policy in Domain Three.

After dividing the domains into sections and the sections into categories, the next step was to identify common themes which emerged from each of the categories. There were many themes identified in each of the three domains. Some examples of these themes include: (a) embarrassment or intimidation, (b) verbal abuse and name calling, (c) bullying related to physical size or physical differences, and (d) instigators. As a further step in analyzing the data, I then extracted important quotes which illustrated the context of the themes. After developing the themes list, I set up the themes in a table which listed whether or not each participant discussed the theme. This allowed me to combine or eliminate those themes which were less frequent. As part of the organization of the data, I set up a table listing the separate domains, which were broken down into sections, then categories, then themes, and finally important quotes.

The last step of the analysis process involved verification. The findings were evaluated and interpreted by two independent readers who were familiar with the study and its implications.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

In this study, I did not attempt to prove or verify any particular perspective, but sought to relate the actual experiences shared by the participants in the study. I tried to set aside my personal opinions, assumptions, and judgments in order to guard against distortion of the data. I made every attempt to conduct this study with as little

interference as possible in order to gain a true picture of the personal experiences the participants had had with student bullying in rural middle schools. In order to accomplish this, I used a bracketed approach to suspend personal bias. There are five steps associated with bracketing, according to Denzin (as cited in Patton, 2002). These steps apply to this study in the following ways:

- Locate in the responses key phrases which are directly related to bullying.

- Interpret the meanings of these phrases.

- Assign meaning to these phrases based upon the participants' interpretation.

- Determine what these phrases reveal about being an observer of student bullying.

- Develop a definition of bullying interventions based upon the recurring meanings.

Using teachers' own words through their responses helps to ensure the lack of personal bias on the part of the researcher.

<p style="text-align:center">Credibility</p>

In this study, credibility was determined by using a method of triangulation known as investigator or analyst triangulation (Patton 1990). Two independent readers were asked to read and analyze the same sections of data. I then compared their independent analyses to my own. This step in the analysis helped to reduce potential bias and provided a better assessment of the reliability and the validity of the data. The independent observers' interpretation of the data meant that I did not have to rely solely on my own analysis and that I was able to develop a clearer, more unbiased look at the data.

Transferability

Transferability refers to how well the findings apply to other rural school settings and depends upon the similarities between the two compared settings. In the present study, the five schools in question are comparable to other middle schools across the southern Appalachian region in the categories of numbers of students and teachers, discipline referrals, and attendance. Possible limitations to transferability may include comparison to another school with a distinctly different size, location, or culture: e.g., a school more or less tolerant of bullying, or a school with a stronger or weaker policy toward bullying. In addition, a school which represents a more or less rural population may present limitations to transferability.

Dependability

Dependability refers to whether findings are consistent across time within the same participants and setting. In a phenomenological study, the intent is to examine the actual experiences of the phenomenon and to account for the changes in the context in which the research occurs. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the possibility of using a process called an inquiry audit to determine dependability within a qualitative study. The purpose of this process is to examine both the process and the product in order to determine if the research is consistent. In this study, dependability was determined by comparing my initial analysis to the analyses of two independent readers who examined both the process for analysis and the findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to how well the results are confirmed by others. In this study, the use of tape recorded interviews and a journal kept throughout the study to take notes and document ongoing data analysis determined confirmability. In addition, two independent readers examined the data and the analysis to determine confirmability.

After participants were interviewed, data were analyzed to determine meaning and to gather common experiences of participants. Suggestions for further research and significant implications are discussed in the last chapter of the study. Participants and administrators will be provided with feedback from the completed, approved study but due to the confidential nature of the study, individual teacher responses will not be available for review.

In summary, the proposed study was qualitative in nature and design. It was designed to discover the experiences teachers have had with student bullying in five rural middle schools. Through these interviews with selected teachers, a greater understanding of teacher perspectives about student bullying was developed. All necessary precautions were taken to ensure confidentiality of the participants in this study and to protect the participants from any harm.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS PART I, TEACHERS' STORIES

Case Analysis

According to Patton (2002) inductive analysis begins with constructing individual cases without categorization or comparison to one another. After the separate cases are developed, a cross-case analysis provides an in-depth look at the patterns and themes which cut across individual cases and common among cases. In this study, the teachers' stories were developed as individual cases to provide an overview of each participant's experiences with student bullying.

During this study, I interviewed 13 teachers from 5 different rural middle schools. I asked these teachers to share their experiences with student bullying and to tell me what impact student bullying has on the teachers, students and parents who deal with the problem on a daily basis. Many of the teachers were victims of student bullying themselves, and they shared their experiences in the hope that they would be able to help others who had also been victimized. The introductory part of this chapter includes the teachers' stories as they told them to me.

These teacher voices heard in their stories reflect the personal experiences teachers have had with student bullying and how they have dealt with the problem. They provide insight into the complexities of student bullying and how teachers deal with certain situations including the interventions they have used, the professional development they have had, and whether or not they were involved in the development of anti-bullying policy.

Throughout the stories, common themes begin to emerge which speak to the essence of life in rural middle schools. Teachers discuss, but not always agree on the impact of the rural environment on bullying, and whether or not bullying in their schools is overemphasized by parents and members of the media. Although they say in their responses that they are supported by their administration, their comments indicate otherwise. They talk about ineffective disciplinary decisions, their lack of involvement in decision making, and even being left alone with no office support after being bullied in their own classrooms.

Throughout the stories, teachers discuss the idea of a trusting relationship between teachers and students as a crucial element in dealing with student bullying. They talk about the need for students to feel as though they have an adult in a position of authority with whom they can talk in a time of need. They also discuss the advantages of team teaching and counseling services as effective means for dealing with student bullying.

What follows is a brief synopsis of the experiences teachers have had in relation to student bullying. It is important for those who deal with bullying and set policy to listen to the stories these teachers tell. Only by hearing these stories can administrators and researchers gain a better sense of what actually takes place in schools. And only by listening to teacher voices can we begin to develop interventions which are aimed at diminishing student bullying.

Adam's Story

Adam is a seventh-grade veteran teacher. In describing his experiences with student bullying, he said, "I'm going to be honest with you. Over my six or seven years of teaching, the most frequent type of bullying issues I have encountered have been with

female students in the form of relational aggression." He said female students would often pick a student randomly and alienate that student from the group. He explained,

> Once they single one certain person out, they will make their way around to the circle of students that the other person that's being singled out comes in contact with; trying to ensure that girl has a hard time making friends.

He said that this kind of bullying occurred more frequently than any other type he has had to deal with as a teacher. He perceived this type of bullying as very difficult for students due to the importance of belonging at this age. He expressed having difficulty finding consistent solutions to the problems associated with female bullying.

His experiences revealed that bullying was not limited to females, and he described an incident involving male aggression and racial bullying.

> I had noticed a trend of them singling out this young man who was from California. I am pretty sure part of his ethnicity, he was at least part Hispanic, and they had begun to call him "Paco" in class. They seemed to get quite a kick out of it. Now, I could tell the young man they were picking on, he kind of played along with it, but I could tell that it bothered him. And I had observed these young men, you know, a couple of times, bring him almost to the point of tears, by just picking at him, making fun, in front of other students, and things like that.

He said that the development of a trusting relationship with his students was essential when dealing with student bullying.

> As a middle-school teacher, you don't want to get wrapped up in it, but to relate to the kids and to really connect with them, you have be at least aware of so much of the drama and kind of buy into that just a little bit so you can connect with

them and so they will trust you.

He felt that one of the reasons he has been successful as a teacher was because he was able to make connections with the kids and with the community. The biggest mistake he has seen other teachers make has been to take an attitude of "us against them" when dealing with students.

According to Adam, parental involvement was a positive factor when dealing with student bullying. Often, he explained, he felt limited in what he could do to stop bullying if parents were not supportive of his efforts. He described several incidents of young men bullying other students that he was able to deter successfully because the students knew he would involve their parents.

> The clincher for those young men was I told them in no uncertain terms that, if we had to have any part of that conversation again, we would be sitting at the same table, in the same conference room with all six parents.

Adam said he believed that bullying was viewed as a serious issue in his school and that it could be much worse if not for the small community and the cultural values to which the community ascribes.

> I think one of the reasons we don't see more bullying issues than we do, is no matter, even though those children may come from a broken home, they may live with their grandparents, with a single parent. They still are born into, and if they aren't born into it, they are living in it now, a culture that is pretty grounded in a certain level of respect for the generation before them.

Regarding specific training and his involvement in policy development, he recounted very little training on the topic of bullying and could only remember attending

one session since he began teaching. If there had been more opportunities, he was not aware of them. He was not directly involved in the development of anti-bullying policy except through his representative on the school improvement team.

Barbara's Story

Barbara is a veteran elective teacher. In describing her experiences with student bullying, she defined bullying as "Anytime you repeatedly make somebody feel less than themselves or threatened or scared." She related the story of a student who was intimidating another student at different times during the day when teachers were unable to observe him. She said he:

> wasn't bullying the kid out loud, where you could hear it, but any time he would pass him in the hallway or where a teacher's back was turned, where he knew he wasn't being seen, he would call the kid all kinds of names. I don't think he was physically threatening him, but he was definitely working to upset him.

In this case, she said the bully was a larger student and the victim was a "skinny, geeky kid with glasses."

Barbara didn't feel that bullying was a major problem in her middle school and believed the media often blew it out of proportion. She said,

> Parents are so afraid, in my opinion, to send their kids to middle school. I have parents of my daughters' friends who are freaking out because there is so much bullying at our school when I don't really think there is that much.

One of her biggest concerns, however, was that even though she did not see a lot of bullying, she often saw an inconsistency in how bullying incidents were dealt with. She believed that sometimes administrators and teachers avoided dealing with students

who acted as bullies simply because of who their parents were. "It's like on this one hand, we have the media scaring everybody to death, and then on the other hand, I feel like we don't do enough with the incidents we do have even though they are not major." As an example, she described an incident involving a student who became increasingly aggressive toward his peers. His behaviors escalated to the physical assault of other students. In one incident, he punched a fellow student in the ribs so hard that the student had to go to the hospital. The troubling behaviors reached a peak when he urinated on another student in the restroom. Barbara expressed frustration with the handling of the entire situation, and added that, although the school's administration had tried to discipline the student, his parents' influence with contacts at central office resulted in his never receiving any major punishment.

She described another situation that illustrated how teachers could become victims of bullying, too. The incident involved a female student whom she described as "extremely unstable." The student began skipping classes in order to visit Barbara's classroom. Barbara recalled how the student came into the class one day and refused to let Barbara or any of the students use the phone or leave the room. Finally, one of her students managed to sneak out of the classroom and sought the help of another teacher who sent for help from the office. She said the worst part of the incident was that no one ever came to help. The bullying student held her and many of her students hostage for more than 20 minutes, and even though the office was notified, Barbara's "heroes never showed up."

When asked how she would describe a typical bully victim, she said, "I don't know that there is a typical middle school bullying victim because part of it is middle

school is such a tender age." She explained that sometimes students, because they are so sensitive at this time in their lives, feel like they are being bullied when that may not really be the case. Regarding students who bully, Barbara reported feeling that a student who targeted others was often insecure and was attempting to somehow make himself or herself look better at the victim's expense. "They try to find somebody to make themselves look better. Like if I pick on him then I can be the big man on campus." She said she rarely sees incidents where victims bring it on themselves.

She explained that female students often have a hard time with being excluded from social groups. "Girls definitely want to be part of a group, and if they are not, then they feel like somebody doesn't like them and that they are being picked on." On the other hand, she said that boys tended not to make a big deal out of being excluded.

She reported that lately she had not seen many incidents of bullying related to social or sports groups. She attributed this to coaches doing a great job of taking care of students who bully others. She also explained that, although she did not see a lot of cyberbullying, it could be because she was not technologically savvy. She recalled an incident with one of her students who she said was, "cutting herself very, very, badly and taking pictures of it and posting it on Devo—not Facebook—the one before Facebook." She also had one female student who took a picture of herself in a hoodie and sent it out to all of her friends with a message, "Don't vote for this other person for homecoming queen because she sucks. Vote for me."

In relation to racial bullying, she explained that, in her particular middle school, there was not a lot of racial diversity and therefore there was not a lot of bullying due to racial or cultural reasons. She also commented that the attitude toward race had greatly

improved since she began teaching in the school, reporting that she did not hear as many racial slurs as she once did. She recalled,

> When I first started working there, even the principal used the word "nigger." He would say something like we will "nigger-rig" this and things like that; and I was like, what? You are a grown up, in a position of power! What are you doing?

She voiced the opinion that the rural environment had an impact on bullying in both positive and negative ways.

> On the positive side, we have a lot less than a lot of other schools. On the negative side, we do have the ignorant person that says, "Just punch him, son, if he irritates you. You just go and punch him" kind of thing.

She reported that there were students in her school who had been raised in the "boys will be boys" mentality. She said she regretted observing that kind of attitude and said she felt sorry for those students who were never taught to work out their differences by discussing issues.

In regard to successful interventions she has used to deal with student bullying, Barbara explained that she loved her kids and that she felt it was important to develop a trusting relationship between students and teachers. She said if you just believe that they are wonderful; they rise to what your belief is. If you believe they are horrible, they rise to your belief. I feel like I do have a pretty good relationship with them. She said students come to her with their problems. She reported that just talking with the students and being honest with them was an effective intervention. She acknowledged, however, that there were "some bullies who are not going to listen to anything." She explained that it was important to address bullying situations and to let students talk about bullying

incidents so that they do not happen again. Because she worked with an elective team and did not share the same students with her teammates, she did not feel team teaching was very effective. However, she said she had a good working relationship with her colleagues and they acted as a support group for one another. Whereas academic teams shared the same students and had the opportunity to discuss how students were doing throughout the day, she and her colleagues had different students. She explained that the only thing her team could do was to separate students who would potentially have problems with one another.

Charles' Story

Charles is a veteran sixth-grade teacher. At one time, he was the only male teacher on the sixth-grade hall. "I was the social studies teacher and the only male teacher on the team."

When I asked him about problems he had experienced with student bullying in his school, he explained that, although bullying did happen, he thought the problem might not be as bad as some portrayed it. "I think there is some over emphasis when it comes to bullying. I think if you go back and talk to people fifty years ago, there were probably bullies then as well." He reported that parents often had an unrealistic perception of how much bullying took place in school; he blamed this misperception on the media and the culture of the country for blowing school violence and bullying out of proportion.

In describing some of his experiences with student bullying and the problems he had observed with school violence, he told the story of a student who he said was very good at picking on others when teachers were not nearby. At first, he reported, the student used a lot of verbal bullying to intimidate others and was very careful to choose

students who would not fight back. Eventually, the bullying escalated to the point of physical altercations, including incidents in the restrooms and other less supervised locations. Regarding victims, he reported that, "They were afraid to tell on him because he was a little bit bigger, and I think he was lacking in social skills himself." Charles blamed the bully's actions on a lack of social skills and the need for attention from his peers. "I think deep down he was looking for friends, but he didn't know how to do it in the right way, so I think he just used intimidation to try to get friends."

Charles explained that a lot of the bullying he had observed took place on school buses and in locker rooms. "I know that, at least in our rural county, we share buses with the high school." He expressed concern over the fact that younger students rode with older students, fearing that the arrangement invited a bullying-type of atmosphere. In the locker rooms, he reported observing that students were often confronted with not only a lack of supervision, but also circumstances which could lead to bullying because students witnessed their peers' physical characteristics on a more personal basis. "Students developmentally and socially are so unique at this age when they are in the dressing room getting ready for P.E. That is certainly an opportune time for bullies to do their thing."

Charles said that bullying was different depending upon whether students were male or female. According to Charles, males were often more physical and aggressive, whereas females often bullied one another more verbally. "As a teacher, I dealt a lot with girl's name calling, making fun of other girls, getting in cliques and making fun of one or more other girls."

He explained that it was difficult to describe what a typical bully victim looked like.

I think a victim of bullying would be a student, in most cases, who is fairly intelligent, or academically up there with their grades. Usually isolated in the sense that they are a very polite student, but they don't usually go out of their way just to talk to you, as the teacher, or other students. They may have their small group of friends, and they kind of stick to themselves.

He reported observing incidents where victims appeared to bring the bullying on themselves by acting inappropriately and by being unable to read social cues. "I just remembered thinking when a child was being the victim of a bully; I am thinking 'Why would you do that? It is just making it worse.'" He speculated that those students were often reaching out for attention and inadvertently causing themselves to be bullied. Like the victims, the bullies themselves often did not have a lot of friends. He speculated that bullies may have been trying to get attention and may have targeted victims in an effort to impress other students.

Charles said it was crucial for students and teachers to have a strong, trusting relationship with one another. "I think it is very important and if a student, or even as adults, we go to those we trust when we have a problem." He suggested that students should feel as though they could count on their teachers when it came to bullying.

He affirmed that the team-teaching approach worked well when dealing with student bullying and reported feeling fortunate to begin his career with a group of teachers who functioned well as a team. "I think we all had the same outlook on teaching and that you have to care for the students first and then try to teach them second." He explained that, when all of the teachers on the team had the same expectations, bullying and discipline issues were not as frequent. He expressed a desire for the team approach to

also involve parents in addressing bullying. "I think a lot of people want the parents in the building. What I want is I just want the parents in the student's lives." Overall, Charles believed parents were pretty receptive when teachers communicated with them and that "Most parents want their children to be safe here at school."

Charles expressed appreciation for the administration in his building and commented that they were very supportive when it came to dealing with student bullying. Although he would like to, he had not had much specific training on bullying. "I would like something on how to help a bully because, especially in middle school, bullies are still helpable. They can still be reached and find something positive about themselves and turn that bullying tendency around."

At the end of our interview, I asked Charles if he would have any suggestions for researchers or administrators who are trying to develop more effective ways of dealing with student bullying. He responded,

> The children offer a lot of insights that adults sometimes don't think they can, so I would say, first, talk to the children. Second, look at the data, where is bullying happening at and maybe through surveys you can find out why it is happening.

David's Story

David is a veteran fifth-grade teacher. In recalling his experiences with student bullying, he described an incident with a larger male student who, through intimidation, bullied a smaller student throughout the year. "The physical size, right there, the differentiation between those two physical sizes created a bullying issue throughout the year." The bullying would take place in the hallway or in the cafeteria, as well in the classroom. The bullying student realized he "had a physical edge strength-wise and he

picked up on that pretty quick and realized that this was a fear factor for the smaller student." He reported that, although there were only a few incidents of pushing and shoving, mental and emotional bullying was ongoing. "I just kind of felt like that the smaller student, even though he was the same age, the same grade level, there was kind of, an uncomfortableness, kind of knowing that he was three seats over." He explained that once the student had established his dominance, the smaller student somewhat accepted it. "Okay, we have kind of established a pecking order here now and I am kind of low in this." As a teacher, he acknowledged that it was difficult for him to intervene because the larger student had not done anything physically to the smaller student. David reported that the smaller student experienced a sense of worry that most likely affected his class work and performance.

Like the situation with the two students, David believed that most bullying happened during transition times and very seldom happened in a regular classroom. "I have been teaching 15 years. In my classroom, my classroom is very fast paced, very interactive; students just really don't have time to do a lot of other stuff." According to David, the fact that his school campus was split into multiple buildings gave students the opportunity to bully one another on the way to and from class or in other less supervised situations. One way, he said, that his school addressed class transitions was through team teaching. As a member of a team, he explained that, he was able to discuss the particulars of student behavior and was better informed about what was going on in students' lives.

Another way he related for dealing with student bullying was parental involvement, which he added was extremely important. "My philosophy is a telephone call pays high dividends." He asserted that it was definitely worth the time it took to call

parents to let them know what was going on in their child's life. "I am a very firm advocate in notifying parents very early on in academics or bullying or whatever." He reported feeling that the community was very supportive of the schools and that he could count on parents to help him with difficult situations. He speculated that the rural environment helped to decrease the amount of bullying that took place in his school. He explained that kids often knew each other on a personal basis from a very young age and that they grew up respecting each other's feelings. "I think there is a sort of family unit to this small setting." David said that the rural environment allowed him to communicate with parents on a more personal basis and that he felt that like this helped him to better meet students' needs. "You know, you see folks at the grocery store, you see them lots of places; I guess everybody kind of knows everybody's name. That has a positive impact."

According to David, students who were victims of bullying were often nervous, did not perform well academically, and exhibited poor attendance. Often those students were targeted, he said, because of their physical size or because they were not able to read social cues. He acknowledged that in some instances victims actually brought the bullying upon themselves. He described an incident with one such student who tried to "totally dominate the group, and this particular group of students didn't respond well, and they just wanted to kind of ignore that, and he took that as, 'Well, I am being ignored and bullied.'" He speculated that the bullying student exhibited over-aggression as a kind of "shock value" in order to get attention.

David reported a positive relationship with his students and felt as though the students trusted him and could come to him with their problems. He said trust is extremely important and if students do not feel like they have an avenue for taking care

of the situation, it is going to escalate into a feeling of helplessness that is going to be hard to overcome. He said it is critical that students have an outlet, someone to talk to and someone they can confide in.

He expressed feeling supported by his administration and added that he felt very fortunate to have a state safe schools consultant who lived and worked as an administrator in the same region of the state. He explained that his county had been through a number of quality anti-bullying training sessions and that it participated as a bully-free district. "It has been phenomenal; the amount of information that we have been trained on and given to, to address bullying." Teachers in his school were given the flexibility to incorporate anti-bullying measures, which they could use when they felt it was appropriate. David reported that teachers were definitely involved in the development of the school's anti-bullying policy and that they continued to provide input for any revisions to the policy. "Yes, we would look at policies and one of the things is the size of the school here, is the communication between the teachers. And if we saw something needed to be addressed, we would go from there."

If he were making suggestions for what researchers and administrators could do to help with student bullying, David would suggest finding out why some students do not seem to fit in from a social aspect. He expressed the opinion that, if we as educators could better understand why some students do not fit in, we might be able to stop bullying problems before they got out of hand.

Elaine's Story

Elaine is a veteran seventh-grade teacher. In describing how she felt about student bullying in rural middle schools she said she thinks bullying is sometimes

overemphasized and blown out of proportion. She said she thinks sometimes, part of growing up is learning how to deal with stuff, and sometimes teachers might intervene when kids could work it out on their own.

She has observed a number of bullying incidents, but one incident involving a larger student who was being picked on by three smaller students stands out in her mind. Because the victim was a quiet student, she believed that, "They saw him as pickable and were giving him a hard time and kind of harassing him, making fun of him, and being obnoxious teenagers to him." She explained that the bullying escalated during a field day at the end of the year when the student had had all he could take from the smaller students. Elaine speculated that the students had probably been victims themselves and that they saw him as an opportunity to let out their frustrations. She said that this type of bullying was not the norm and that usually larger students picked on smaller students.

According to Elaine, most victims were quiet and shy and tended to be reserved. "Sometimes they are a just little bit different, they kind of march to a different drummer." She acknowledged that sometimes she saw students bring bullying upon themselves and recalled the story of a student who was bullied by his peers because of his actions. The student, she said,

> would do things at lunch that were gross, and he would make comments in class. He really wanted to fit in with the boys, but he didn't know how to do that. And because he was a little socially inept, he got picked on.

She related observing some similarities between victims and bullies. According to Elaine, bullies could also be students who were suffering from personal issues, which made them want to target others in order to get attention.

A lot of times their home life is challenging. They usually don't live with both

parents; they have some kind of situation where they may or may not go back and

forth but they don't like their home life for some reason. The bullies are, I guess,

students who have not had a lot of success academically. They see someone else

they can pick on and let out some of those frustrations.

In addition, she speculated that bullies might also have been victims of bullying

themselves at some point.

She said she was fortunate to be able to teach alongside a strong group of teachers

on a team and that communication with her teammates had proven to be a very valuable

resource.

Certainly at the end of the day, when we have planning together, we will talk

about things we have seen with the students, like what is going on with this

student, and have you seen that happen in your classroom. We try to communicate

and be aware and make each other aware of what is going on so we can keep a

watchful eye.

She reported that she and the members of her team tried to work closely with parents in

order to gain their support in critical issues such as bullying so that parents could address

at home the same issues that teachers address at school.

She commented on her belief that she had a good relationship with her students

and that she worked hard to build trust in her classroom.

I think that is the most important thing I do as a teacher, is try to build an open

rapport where I can talk to them if they are having trouble, let them know that

they can come ask questions, tell me what is going on.

Although she thought her students would come to her with their problems, she felt that there was an unfortunate lack of male role models in her middle school. She observed her belief that, "if boys are having trouble, they don't want anybody to know. A lot of times, if I see it, and I talk to the boys; they will talk to me but they are rarely going to initiate that conversation."

Because she has experienced bullying on a personal basis, she believed she was better able to understand what victims were going through. She said she thinks her personal experiences with bullying when she was growing up helps her, sometimes, to know what to say to the victims. She said she tries to encourage them and help them know how to deal with things, to let them know that it is okay to tell someone when something is going on.

She talked about the effect of the rural environment on bullying and said,

At our school, bullying is an issue because it is an issue any time you get a group of kids together, you are going to have some bullying, but I would say it is pretty minor compared to a lot of other schools that are not rural.

She expressed concern that as the culture changed and her community became less rural, there could be more problems with bullying. She said that she worried that the very rural students would experience some friction with other, more diverse cultures moving into her area.

Although Elaine's school had a zero-tolerance bullying policy, she reported being unsure whether teachers were involved in developing the policy. "We had a discipline committee of teachers who worked last summer to come up with a discipline policy and within that, bullying was addressed."

Elaine suggested that school counselors conduct anti-bullying sessions with entire classes. She reported having observed similar sessions and found them to be very effective in elementary school; she thought continuing in middle school would prove to be beneficial as well.

Frances' Story

Frances is a veteran sixth-grade teacher. She defined bullying as, "One person making another person feel uncomfortable, whether it is physical or emotional or excluding or whatever." She described a situation involving a bright student who was "different; he was odd, he was weird, he had weird parents, he had a rat's tail, or whatever that hair-do is." She reported that several students in her class made fun of him throughout the year. According to Frances, no matter what she did, she could not get the bullying to stop. "It was one of the worst years as a teacher that I have had." She explained that the student had a speech impediment, and a slight lisp, and that he did not try to fit in with the other kids. "He wasn't really that concerned with changing anybody's opinion of him, which is a good thing; but they, it was just relentless." She said that, if she could do the situation over again, she would do it quite differently.

I would have involved parents; but at the time, I was still fairly new at teaching, and I tried to manage it. But I think I would have contacted those parents of those kids who were so mean to him.

Since that incident she acknowledged dealing with bullying in different ways. She talked about the importance of a trusting relationship with her students. "One of the things that, in my classroom, I try to create, from the beginning of the year, create a community." She reported success in her use of a book called "Huuway for Wodney

Wat," a picture book about a kid with a speech impediment. In the story, the kids made fun of him until a big rat, which was smarter than the other rodents, moved in and made them feel very uncomfortable. She explained that she used the story to explore bullying with her students and to help them realize the potential problems. She speculated that bullies were often insecure and that that was why they picked on others. She said that encouraged students to stand up for one another by telling them,

> In the end, it's not the words of your enemies you remember, but the silence of your friends. Everybody would stand up for little Wodney Wat; he's cute, he's sweet, but what if he stinks, and he's obnoxious to be around. Are you going to stick up for him then?

As part of her community-building activities, she reported assigning random groups of students to work together. She observed that the small group atmosphere was great for community building because, "They do get to know each other, and I think that helps, when you get to know somebody, really get to know them. I think that helps a lot, especially with this age."

She expressed concern about students who bring bullying upon themselves, intentionally or unintentionally. She described an incident with a former student who, she said, had a bad case of body odor. "Nobody wanted to work with him, and he was fat, and I think he was picked on. But the thing about him, he was a big boy, and he would bully smaller kids." She expressed regret for how she handled the situation, remarking that she should have gone to the school nurse for help sooner. She did not seek help, she said, because, "It is very difficult to call someone up and tell them their kid stinks." She

explained that eventually the nurse called and talked to the parent about the child's body odor and problems at school.

According to Frances, there were a lot of advantages to teaching on a team; team-teaching, she said, enabled teachers to deal with student bullying in a more constructive way. She expressed feeling disturbed about the school's plans to move away from the team-teaching model and reported that she was never given a solid reason as to why, except to be told that they were not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Although Frances was sure that her school had a bullying policy, she did not know what it was, and she was not sure whether teachers had had any part in developing it. Although she felt supported by administration when it came to bullying, she acknowledged not always agreeing with the way administration handled bullying incidents. She recalled a specific incident involving a group of Hispanic students who were being targeted by this "bunch of red neck boys," adding that it was obvious to her that the bullying was racially motivated. She expressed concern that, despite the seriousness of the issue, the school showed no mediation or attempt at counseling. All of the bullying students involved, she said, were simply suspended. She also recounted how the administration had unsuccessfully attempted to assign all Hispanic students to the same homeroom. According to Frances, the results were not positive and the students developed a "gang mentality." She said the students were dispersed into different homerooms by the end of the year.

According to Frances, attempts to provide teachers with training were not always successful in her school.

A couple of years ago, two, three or four years ago, we did this mediation training

where we were trained mediators. We were going to implement this school wide,

students were going to be mediators, students who had issues with each other. It

just fizzled out. It was never implemented.

Grace's Story

Grace is a veteran seventh-grade teacher who said that bullying was an issue that

was extremely important to her. She experienced bullying as a student when she was

growing up, and because of those experiences, she felt she was able to identify with her

students about bullying. She described several incidents of bullying which took place in

her school. One incident involved a male student who was targeted because of his

physical characteristics.

I had a student in my inclusion class, a male student, who wears hearing aids. I

am not sure if he had any birth defects, but his nose was a little bit flatter than

most kids, and he was picked on by a new kid near the end of the year. I think he

was picked on by some of the kids who had known him for years too, before, but

they were more quiet about it.

She recalled students whispering across the room, calling him names like "flat nose." In

one incident, Grace recalled how a female student had attacked him in the hallway,

throwing something at him and spitting on him. She identified with the bullied student

because of the bullying she experienced growing up.

I was born with a cleft palate birth defect, and I just kind of empathized with him,

privately, about how I was picked on a lot because I couldn't say the letter *s*, and I

had to go to speech therapy and just try to make him feel better.

According to Grace's observations, physical appearance was often the main reason students were targeted for bullying. A lot of incidents occurred, she said, in the locker rooms and in P.E., often as a result of having to undress in front of other kids. She reported that she and her teammates often discussed ways they could help students with this issue.

How can we help with this kid to help him not to have dress out in front of the other kids because they are picking on him about being a bigger size or just looking different, in any way, like more hair on their arms?

She explained that the reasons students were targeted were not always readily visible to her and her colleagues. "It could be something so slight that you and I wouldn't notice, but middle schoolers zoom in; especially the ones that are tuned in to bullying." She said students picked out anything that was different about their peers and exploited that difference in the form of bullying.

Through her observations, Grace found that, whereas males used more physical means to bully one another, female bullying was more psychological.

I guess, like they will freeze you out, they will freeze the other girl out and not talk to her, not let her be in the little click, get the other friends to not talk to her; a kind of isolation with that kind of bullying with the girls.

Grace said she tried to have a good relationship with her students. "I think of myself as kind of the favorite aunt, but not the one who is too lax." Although she implemented guidelines and structure in her class, she felt her students knew that they could trust her and that, if they brought a problem to her, she would try to take care of it. "I think they trust me because of that, they usually feel like they can tell me what is going

on." She expressed the importance of trust; that students needed somebody they could talk to, and that, a lot of times, their needs were immediate. Grace remarked, "If they wait, it is going to get worse."

Grace reported that she was a part of a team-teaching situation and that felt lucky to be able to teach with the only male teacher in the seventh grade.

He is a coach and a great disciplinarian, and he is right next to the boy's bathroom, and I am at the other end of the hall. He has been great to take care of some issues here and probably knows a lot about the boy/boy kind of issue.

She and her teammates often discussed bullying in their team meetings, and through her own experiences, she was able to help her teammates define what bullying actually was.

In discussing the rural environment and how it contributes to bullying, she thought that in general her school was lucky to be in a "real sweet rural area overall." She commended the schools in her area for using "common sense" to deal with bullying problems, as opposed to overreacting to situations that could be handled differently. She explained that the rural environment was often very accepting of new kids and that, although it was a

close-knit community, "it kind of lends itself to drawing people in." She said that the general population often welcomed into the culture new students who had similar rural values.

In regard to her personal experiences with bullying, Grace thought that everyone experienced bullying at some point in life. She recalled several experiences she had personally had with bullies.

I had a birth defect. I remember being little and on the school bus, and this boy

would say, 'take out your teeth', because I couldn't grow teeth because I had a

cleft palate and a cleft lip, and I didn't know, I was just a little kid, I was like,

Okay, what about it.

Because of her own experiences with bullying, Grace expressed feeling empathy

toward bullying victims adding that she tried to prevent bullying and to stop it before it

escalated. Grace has initiated anti-bullying strategies, often in the form of discussion with

her students, and recalled telling her students, "You are going through it. It has been a

long time since I have been there, so you tell what will work and what won't work," In

her opinion, asking students their thoughts and opinions made students feel "more

important, more empowered, and a part of the solution." Outside of a school-wide

initiative with the program "Love and Logic," she has not had a lot of anti-bullying

training. She reported that most of the time she dealt with student bullying by relying on

her own experiences.

Helen's Story

Helen is a veteran sixth-grade teacher. In describing her experiences with student

bullying, she told the story of a male student who was being verbally abusive to the other

students in her class. According to Helen, the problem escalated when he targeted several

students in particular.

I had several students come to me and complain, in groups or singularly, about his

threats, his condescension when he would speak to them, his name calling, and

this was very upsetting to me because there were no physical reminders that the

students had been bullied but there were definitely psychological reminders.

She explained that his was a good example of how bullying was not always physical in nature. She reported that, throughout the year, both male and female students came to her upset and agitated about the bullying student's verbal and psychological abuse. She recalled how she had tried to talk to him, but he only continued with what she called a "victim mentality." "He just felt like everybody was picking on him, but he wasn't doing anything wrong." Although he had the potential to be an A-B student, Helen explained that he did not apply himself in that manner.

Helen expressed her feelings of being supported by administration when it came to bullying and dealing with bullying issues at both the school and district level. She explained that support was extremely important and that, "If you don't have that support, you don't have any power to your punch, so to speak." According to her, if students found out that administrators failed to follow through with policy, teachers would be left without support and the ability to enforce procedures.

Her school identified itself as a bully-free zone and had a zero-tolerance policy with regard to bullying. "I talk extensively about my classroom being a safe environment all year, so my students know I do not tolerate bullying." She felt sure that teachers were involved in developing the anti-bullying policy put into place before she began teaching at the school. In addition, the school had an active involvement in the Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) program, which, according to Helen, complemented the anti-bullying policy. "I do not see the suspension, whether it is in-school suspension (ISS) or out-of-school suspension (OSS), as effective in dealing with bullying issues." She reported that students had told her they enjoyed ISS and OSS and that they thought of it as a day off from school. For that reason, she felt suspension was not an effective punishment.

She found that strong relationships were important in dealing with student bullying. In particular, she thought that the involvement of parents was fundamental. "I think when these kids are acting out aggressions they are very often born in the home." She voiced concern about parental involvement and remarked that parents should take more of an active responsibility in teaching their children how to behave. Furthermore, she expressed the opinion that parents relied too much on teachers to discipline their children. .

Helen expressed believing that she had a good relationship with her students and reported that they came to her often with their problems. "I know a week never went by where I wasn't approached with a child being in distress and very often it would be a few times a day." She described one incident involving a student who, while walking down the hall, decided for no apparent reason to kick another student in the back. The other student was smaller, she said and "kind of geeky." Afterward, while trying to deal with the situation, the bully told Helen that the smaller student had reminded him of his father. After further investigation she learned that his parents were divorced and that he was not very fond of his father. She said she often had to deal with problems of that nature and blamed them on the way, she said, children were allowed to act in this day and time.

I liken it to going back to the whole Bart Simpson mentality, just that snide sarcasm, and you hear it pretty prevalent on television nowadays, on sitcoms, putting other people down, belittling other people, sarcasm, it is just supposedly all in good fun and joking and teasing, but it's painful, it's very painful, especially in these middle-school years that are so pivotal in their psychological growth.

On the same note, she also talked about the importance of a good working relationship with her fellow teachers. She taught in a team-teaching situation, which she described as a wonderful concept. Through team teaching, she has had the opportunity to go to her teammates and ask them questions like, "Are you having problems with so and so, are you noticing such and such with this particular student or another particular student, or what are you observing in your class?" She explained that the team-teaching situation allowed more opportunities for adults to observe students throughout the day.

She stressed that it was difficult to determine whether bullying was overemphasized in the general public. She speculated that, because of educators focused so much on bullying; it almost became a self-fulfilling prophecy. On the other hand, she acknowledged that bullying was a serious issue that should not be ignored in any way. "It seems that bullying nowadays can escalate into more violent issues and also more hurtful issues." Because Helen experienced bullying when she was growing up, she felt it had shaped much of who she was. "My bullying situations were very painful and very frightening. I, having been a victim, I obviously don't have a lot of tolerance for bullies, although I do really try to talk to these students."

She reported that, although she has had no formal, anti-bullying training, she thought an important step in helping to address student bullying would be to look at the responsibility of the parent. She stressed the importance of finding out how children were being raised in the home so that teachers and parents could work together to stop the problem. "All I know is that bullying breaks my heart, and I see it so prevalent."

Ingrid's Story

Ingrid is a veteran eighth-grade teacher. She defined bullying as "Something that makes another person uncomfortable." Ingrid reported that, even as an adult, middle school students sometimes made fun of her as a teacher. Although she reported being able to ignore most bullying, she acknowledged that, when it reached a certain point, she put a stop to it. Ingrid said she liked to remind students that what they were doing was a form of bullying because students, she believed, often had difficulty distinguishing between light-hearted teasing and actual bullying.

In talking about the seriousness of bullying, she recalled one experience in particular which demonstrated the need to take threats seriously. She talked about an episode where a student threatened to bomb the school, resulting in more than 100 students staying home from school. After the student made the threat, Ingrid recalled how other students began texting and e-mailing their friends to the point that the entire student body was upset. She reported that both students and parents had taken the threat seriously. The student who made the threat told teachers he was being teased in P.E. class and that he was "fed up with these kids making fun of me." He said he wanted to retaliate, and the bomb threat was the first thing that came out of his mouth.

Although bullying was a serious issue in her school, she felt as though it was "not as bad as it is in some of the bigger schools." She attributed her belief that her school had not experienced as much bullying to the upbringing kids received in her small community.

> I think with the background, we still feel like there is a right and a wrong, and
> most of the kids still have a conscience, and when you get out into bigger city

schools where there are thousands of kids in a middle school versus 600

in a middle school, it's a big difference.

She said students shared a common heritage which allowed them to make good choices in most cases. She worried that if the cultural demographics in her county changed, the influence of a new culture might not be as positive.

As she was preparing for our interview, she reflected on her childhood and her own personal experience with bullying. Ingrid grew up with three brothers and reported being picked on often. She stressed that, although she felt that it was just "brother-sisterly love," the bullying did affect her self-esteem. She reported being especially troubled by the verbal abuse which consisted of comments about her being ugly and stupid. "It hurt!" She explained that, even when her parents told her brothers to stop, they continued to bully her.

Ingrid expressed the desire to teach a class on self-esteem to kids who had been bullied. The class would focus on showing students how to "let things roll" instead of worrying so much. "I know as an adult, it has taken me a long time to get over some of the things that happened because of my oldest brother." She grew up feeling as though her brother hated her and explained that he had admitted to hating her now that they were older. Because of her experiences, she felt as though she could identify with students who were being bullied and could understand how they felt.

Ingrid stressed that her experiences helped her as a teacher. She recalled telling her students, "Don't say that to them because it hurts their feelings." Often they replied that they were "just playing," but she told them that their behavior still hurt and that she knew how it felt to be degraded even though it was unintentional.

Ingrid began teaching when she was 36 years old. According to her, the fact that she did not start teaching until later in her life has helped her because she has been able to deal with student issues like bullying in a more mature manner than some of the younger teachers in her school. In addition, she expressed her opinion that as a mother who has watched her own child go through school, she has developed a different perspective from teachers who have not had that experience. Her students and fellow teachers often call her "Mom," and her mature and wise perspectives, she said, allowed her the ability to see potential problems when her fellow teachers were not always as perceptive.

She stated that she tried to incorporate fun activities in her classroom with the intent of helping students learn about bullying. She talked about one such activity, in which she demonstrated different types of bullying, and then led students in a discussion about the potential dangers of bullying and the fact that people have been killed because of the way they looked and because they were different. Her students agreed that there was a problem with bullying in their school and that students should not be bullied because they looked different or because they liked to read or because they wore their hair different. They agreed, she said, that it was not acceptable to call each other names and that they should not be made to feel uncomfortable just because they were different. She explained that the activity was an "eye opener" not only for the students but also for her.

She emphasized her belief that her students felt that they could trust her and that they knew she would always be honest with them. She reported often having students who had experienced a great deal of difficulty in their lives ranging from low socioeconomic conditions to a bad family life. She said she showed them respect and

expected it from them in return. Ingrid acknowledged that trust between the teacher and the student was important. She recalled occasions when parents called to tell her that their child was being bullied at school and that she was completely unaware that the bullying was going on. She stressed the importance for students to tell their teachers if they are having problems. The development of a trusting relationship, she said, made it easier to keep teachers informed and students safe.

Ingrid described an incident involving a young Black female student who was targeted by a young White male. The bully would write "Klu Klux Klan," or "KKK" on her papers and would make comments to her. "I walked into my classroom one morning, and he didn't realize I was in there, and he told her to get her 'Black ass back into the classroom.'" The teacher said the female student would "laugh it off" and would try to convince her that she was not bothered by the bullying.

She recognized the need to be "vigilant" all the time and that she could often determine which students were picking on others just by watching their habits and mannerisms. Despite her best efforts, however, she acknowledged that she sometimes missed bullying behavior which was frightening to her. She confessed that often it could happen right in front of her or other teachers and they still might not see it. She said she felt she had to watch and listen constantly to everything that happened when it involved students.

Jessica's Story

Jessica is a veteran eighth-grade teacher. She defined bullying as "Finding a weakness in another person and exploiting it any way you can, whether it be a physical weakness, or a mental weakness or an emotional weakness, whatever it might be." She

speculated that, although some students bullied others in an attempt to "be mean," the main reason students bullied others was that bullying made them feel empowered and more in control of their lives. She expressed her feeling that bullying was a serious issue and that she did not think there could be too much emphasis placed on bullying. She worried that if teachers do not address what she considered "small incidents" of bullying, the incidents would lead to major problems later. "We could easily have a bomb or a gun, or whatever, brought into the school if there is not some type of regulation put on the harassment and on the comments."

According to Jessica, students who bullied one another struggled to be recognized socially by popular kids. Because of the lack of social skills, she often saw victims who brought their bullying on themselves. She recalled an incident with a student who she described as "incredibly immature to be in eighth grade." The student was constantly bragging on himself and trying to seem important. She reported that the student had grown up with all the other kids in the same rural area and that those students knew how to deal with him. Most of them would, she recalled, more or less "shrug off" the way he acted. However, there were some students who could not stand his "continual running commentary" and the fact that he thought he was so important. She speculated that the student was actually trying to be "social" with the other students but that he did not know how. According to her, he lacked social skills and his behavior "rubbed a lot kids the wrong way," which made him a target for bullying.

Jessica provided an example of how physically violent bullying could be when she told the story of two male students who were supposedly friends. The situation began, she said, with simple horse-playing when one of the students became more and more

aggressive. She recalled that a lot of animosity had built up between the two resulting in a fight in which one of the boys was hospitalized with a crushed eye socket. The parents of the victim threatened a law suit. After the incident, both boys said the problem had started with playing and that the situation had escalated. Since the incident happened after school, Jessica was not sure if it could have been prevented.

According to her observations, the rural environment definitely had an effect on bullying in school and its values were not always positive. She reported that she often saw "negative values from students which included racism and bigotry." Having grown up in the county where she taught, she felt familiar with the negatives of small community culture and reported that she continued to see them espoused. She emphasized that as a teacher, she tried to change students' lives so that they would become more "forward thinking." According to Jessica, changing the small community attitude of students and making them more forward thinking was very difficult because it was not always supported by the community. She stressed that mountain culture, not necessarily rural culture, promoted a sense of isolationism in that "mountain people are not, traditionally, receptive to people from the outside coming in." She explained that, although mountain people were not necessarily negative toward outsiders they were not always welcoming of outsiders and could be very suspicious.

"I think I am a little more aware of some stuff just because I knew to look for it when I was growing up." She acknowledged that she knew "what to look for in the kids around her and how to placate the ones that had the tendencies toward being mean." She indicated that she felt that her personal experiences had helped her to look for those tendencies in her students now, as a teacher. Because of her personal experiences, she felt

that she was more aware of the students that had "that look in their eyes of looking for fresh meat or looking for a target." She tried, she said, to keep those types of students from finding targets. "If they have already found one, I try to protect the target as best I can."

She emphasized the importance of students knowing that they could trust someone a position of authority when it came to emotional issues. She recalled an incident involving a female student who was picking on a male student. The male student, she recalled, would sit in her class and cry; she did not know what was bothering him until she finally pulled him away from the other students and asked him to tell her what was going on. The student told her he was tired of being picked on. She asked him if he would like to talk to the counselor and he replied that he did not; but when she asked him if he wanted her to talk to the counselor, he responded that he did. She explained that, if she and the student had not had such a good rapport, he would have never let her help him, and he would still be being bullied. She stressed the fact that students needed someone at school to talk to sometimes for protection, and that often bullies were able to control their victims because the students were afraid to tell their teachers.

Jessica acknowledged that she and the other teachers needed more training about bullying and that new teachers often did not know how to recognize bullying. She suggested that teacher education candidates would benefit from bullying training and that it should be included in teacher education programs.

As far as being involved in the development of anti-bullying policy, she indicated that teachers were able to make suggestions through the school improvement team. She

conceded that if teachers were involved in the development of a bullying policy, it would have been through such a committee.

Kenneth's Story

Kenneth is a veteran eighth-grade teacher. He defined bullying as, "Somebody exerting their will over somebody else." From his observations, middle school bullying was more group participatory as opposed to one-on-one, and often a group of students would single out a student for whatever reason and would begin to pick on him either verbally or physically. He said it was hard to determine how big the problem of bullying was and whether it was overemphasized by the public.

> You want to say "Yes it is," and it is, sort of, maybe to an extent sort of a self-fulfilling prophecy. But then again, if you don't say anything and then something like that occurs, then you have that problem as well.

He acknowledged that his views of bullying might differ from that of other teachers because of the experiences he has had. "I have been in Iraq, terrorist fighting and that sort of stuff. There is really nothing that fazes me, like oh, that is really bad. It's like, you people haven't seen what bad is."

According to Kenneth, bullying could happen anywhere and at any time. "It's not a place-specific thing." He also indicated that bullying was not gender-specific in that he had seen it in both males and females. "The girls tend to be little less overt about it. Kind of more sneaky, and a lot of that I am talking about is spreading rumors and this kind of thing." He stressed that both verbal bullying and exclusion were problematic in middle school, and that there was a great deal of importance placed on being a part of a group.

He conceded that although some bullying between different groups happened, it was not very frequent due to the lack of cultural diversity in the school.

Even if you have a gothic and a jock, they both live out in the country. Even if they live right in town; they are still out in the country, in our county, anyway. So I think that plays a positive role because there is not as much diversity with regard to the bullying.

According to him, the rural environment could also play a negative role in relation to student bullying because of the familiarity students had with one another.

I think you've got a situation where these kids have know each other all their lives, for the most part, and so to an extent familiarity breeds contempt, as they say. And so you can dredge up some stuff about a kid, from one day in second grade and bring it up here again in high school. You know: I remember so and so and he pooped his pants in first grade.

When describing victims, he explained that it was mostly students who "stick out" in some way who were targeted.

At this age, especially early adolescent ages, there is a pretty high importance put on fitting in and kind of doing the right thing and knowing the right people. And when kids don't do that they stick out more and that's when some kids pick on them.

In contrast, he stressed that bullies were often bigger in size, and often targeted others in an attempt to gain attention or to look "cool" in front of their friends.

He described his relationship with students as being positive.

I feel like students can trust me and come to me with their problems, and I make it

very clear that they can. But more importantly the question is: Will they? I mean you can be as open as possible and make yourself available for that sort of thing but if they are unwilling to really talk to you about it, it is hard to do anything sometimes.

He conceded that the issue of trust was very important to students, especially at the middle school age, and that coming to a teacher for help was not always an easy thing to do. "Well, if I tell, then I'm a tattle tale and I am going to get more, get bullied more, get picked on more, because I turned around and told the teacher." According to Kenneth, the mentality of students at this age was to deal with their problems themselves rather than be perceived as "ratting" on other kids. As an intervention, he often tried to simply be "a bigger bully to the bullier." He reasoned that often this approach was successful because if students knew they were going to have to answer to him, they would reconsider before bullying others.

Unfortunately, there were times when students brought bullying upon themselves, which he admitted was difficult for him to deal with or understand. "It's like: Hey! It's almost sometimes like you would swear sometimes they want to get picked on." He recalled an example of a situation involving a student who did what he called "karate moves" in the middle of a large number of students. He could not understand what the student had expected to gain from such behavior and, although it was his job to make the other kids leave the student alone, he completely understood why they were aggravated with the way he was behaving.

As a teacher you are really caught, because you understand on the one point that
kid has the right not to get picked on and a right not to have that. But on the other

hand, it is a reality as well, and you say: "Hey, if you wouldn't do those types of things, then maybe that kid wouldn't pick on you as much."

Kenneth has found that kids at this age have a hard time feeling comfortable with each other, and often with themselves. "This age is really hard, it's a tough age to teach and it's a tough age to live through." He observed the fact that students were often very confused and their bodies and minds were changing so rapidly that it was hard for them to keep up. In relation to bullying at this age, he remarked, "I don't think it should be such a surprise, and I don't think you can absolutely, 100%, stop it." According to him, often students felt both physically and mentally awkward and did not know what to say or do in certain situations. They "start to look silly and that kind of opens them up for bullying."

He acknowledged that although he felt supported by administration when it came to bullying, he was not certain whether teachers had any input in the development of the bullying policy and speculated that the school improvement team was probably involved. Although he has had no formal training outside of the military in dealing with bullying, he suggested talking to students about bullying as an effective intervention.

I don't think sometimes we adults give the students enough credit for being smart. I would ask students about their experiences and I would pick the groups that I knew got bullied and I would pick the groups that you knew were the bullies.

Linda's Story

Linda is a veteran grade level teacher. She felt that bullying was underemphasized in rural schools especially. "That's a big city problem. That's not a problem here. We don't have that problem." She stressed the fact that bullying was a problem everywhere

and reminded me that Columbine was a fairly small school and in a fairly small community.

She indicated that the small community attitude promoted the idea of a "pecking order" which led to the diminishment of the bullying problem.

Boys will be boys. I have heard that way too much, and I am sorry, but girls will be girls too and they can be mean, just a different kind of bullying. It can be down-played somewhat because they think, well, they are just being kids they are not hurting anybody; they will get over it.

According to Linda, most rural students are "good-hearted people." In a small community, however, people from a more urban-type of environment were often treated with mistrust because, she speculated, there was an attitude that they were more likely to be violent because they were from the city. "I think rural communities have traditionally been simpler, kinder, and gentler, but as the culture changes, more rural kids are living closer to the lifestyle of urban kids."

She stressed the importance of peer acceptance to students at this age. "In middle school, popularity is tremendously important." According to Linda, middle-school students often followed a kind of pack mentality and "need to be part of a group. Even if they are low person on the totem pole, if they are part of a group, they are happy." She reported having seen students hang out with other students who bullied them in the past. This observation underscores the fact that being a part of a group is often more important than the bullying they may receive from being a part of that group. "Belonging is more important than anything in their minds." She indicated that even students with more

introverted personalities felt it was important to have someone with whom they had

something in common or someone with whom to hang out.

According to Linda, teachers could often determine whether a student was a bully

victim because of his or her posture. "Rarely are bullied children confident looking." She

said it was difficult for a student to hold his or her head up high if they felt like a victim.

Often students who were victims "crouch down and their shoulders are up high in

literally a defensive posture even though that doesn't help against words or text messages

or that sort of thing." In addition, she observed that these students often lost interest in

their personal grooming because the bullying hurt their self-esteem, and that they often

had the appearance of a defeated attitude.

Linda recalled an incident which she described as the "worst case of bullying I've

ever seen." The incident involved a female student who performed very poorly

academically and who Linda described as a "very affectionate kid." She recalled that, one

day, as she was monitoring the hallway, the student came down the hall crying. When she

stopped the student and asked her what had happened, the student responded, "They were

mean to me." When she asked who had been mean to the student, the student replied,

"The boys in P.E." After investigating the incident, Linda found out that several boys had

taken basketballs and had thrown them at the girl repeatedly. Linda recalled how the girl

had large, red marks all over her body from where the balls had struck her repeatedly.

In another, unrelated incident, Linda told the story of a student who was

physically bullied by a group of students in a classroom for 10 or 15 minutes because the

teacher was distracted by a group of students crowded around his desk. Linda expressed

her dissatisfaction when the matter was turned over to the principal and there were no

consequences for the actions. The student was devastated; and, because of her learning

disability, could not comprehend why the incident had happened to her and why people

would be so mean. The teacher recalled crying when the incident was over because of the

seriousness of the situation and because of what it had done to the student. She expressed

feeling very frustrated that no one had tried to help and that nothing had been done to the

bullies.

Linda emphasized character education as being extremely important when dealing

with bullying issues and suggested that schools should focus their efforts on character

education from the earliest opportunity. She reasoned that it was important for students to

have a sense of school pride because having that sense made students feel as though they

were part of a team. "Being a part of a team makes students feel less like bullying one

another." She stressed the importance for teachers to be trained on how to integrate

character education into the curriculum and across all subjects. In reference to formal

training on bullying, she stated she had participated in training from a consultant, who

was an expert in bullying. In addition, she said that her school had sent teams of teachers

to training sessions with another nationally recognized safe-schools and bullying expert.

The expert's training focused on his personal experiences with bullying and how to

recognize when students may be carrying weapons to school.

Marie's Story

Marie is a veteran grade level teacher. She defined bullying as: "An action in

which someone tries to belittle, put down, or attempts to make someone feel badly about

themselves or afraid." She expressed feeling that teachers could be more successful in

stopping bullying if they would work more toward building communities in their

classrooms. She stressed the importance of developing an appreciation and an understanding between teachers and students and discussed an intervention program called "Rethinking Your Actions" which she said was very successful. The program, she said, was based upon lessons and one-on-one interaction between teachers and students and focused on helping students find alternative ways to deal with other students, rather than hurt them.

Marie was unsure whether bullying was different in her rural environment from any other place. The fact that "people are people and kids are kids" led her to believe there was not much of a difference in the experiences she had had. Although rural areas might be a little more "protective" than non-rural areas, she stressed the fact that there were kids in rural environments who wanted to put each other down and to make themselves feel better by making others feel bad.

Marie indicated that she had a very good relationship with her students and that, although she might not always be successful in changing problem behaviors, she felt she worked well with her students. She believed in community building but acknowledged that, at the

middle-school level, it can be very difficult. "You have to develop those relationships between the kids so they have mutual trust and they feel like they are loved and they belong." She emphasized the importance of getting to know the students in order to truly help them.

According to Marie, students were often excluded from social groups simply because they were "different." She recalled an incident in which a male student who had what she described as "terrible body odor" was consistently left out of groups or made

fun of. He often came to school, she said, with dirty clothes, and had an issue with

hygiene that the school nurse had to address. "It was even difficult for me, the whole

room would reek." She indicated that the student was a very "sweet" boy and that he was

also a hard worker; however, some of the students never accepted him and thought of him

as a "loser" because of his hygiene issues. By the end of the year, some of the students

had gotten to know him and began to accept him, but he continued to be a target for

bullies throughout the entire year.

Marie discussed a number of bullying incidents with which she has had to deal,

including an incident involving a student who intimidated other students and tried to

provoke them into altercations. According to Marie, the bullying student would "walk

toward them with his chest out and his shoulders back and get close to them and try to

provoke them to hit him first, to do something." She emphasized that the student loved to

intimidate others both verbally and physically.

Marie told another story about a student who was smaller than the other students

but who often served as an instigator in bullying situations. In one particular incident, the

student phoned a friend and made unfounded accusations about another student. The next

day, the two students got into a fight. To make matters worse, after the incident was

investigated, administrators found that the smaller student had brought a pellet gun to

school.

Marie speculated that bullying was not widespread and that a small number of

students were responsible for most bullying, which they did repeatedly. According to

Marie, the bullying tendencies in these students had never been addressed, and until those

tendencies were addressed, Marie believed the bullying would continue. In looking at

discipline records, she indicated that it was the same kids who committed the majority of the bullying infractions. This led Marie to suggest that schools should focus their actions on resolving the issues with these students first.

Marie indicated that teachers had a voice in developing anti-bullying policy through the Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) Committee and that she worked hard to implement the school discipline policy. She said that both bullies and their victims often came to her if they felt that bullying had taken place and that she tried to talk to the students who bully in an effort to get them to change their behavior. Marie stated that she did not see the school's anti-bullying policy as necessarily effective because the bullying students were often simply isolated and their problems never really get addressed. Under the school's policy, she said, students were simply placed in-school or out-of-school suspension, and no one ever really got to the core of their problems.

After the Columbine incident, Marie went through a required training on bullying and student safety. Outside of that, she could not remember any specific anti-bullying program that she was a part of. She reported that the administration sometimes distributed articles on new bullying research, but there was a lack of any formal anti-bullying training in her school.

Conclusion

The teachers' stories provided an in-depth look at each participant's experiences with student bullying. All of the teachers who participated in this study were teaching in rural middle schools and are considered veteran teachers. Interestingly, their stories reflected the fact that many of the participants identified themselves as former victims of

bullying. The fact that they have experienced bullying on a personal basis may be indicative of their reasons for participation in the study.

One of the powerful themes that emerged from the case analysis was a sense of the importance of trust. Trust was discussed in the context of teacher-student, teacher-parent, teacher-teacher, and teacher-community relations. Teachers voiced the belief that students who experience bullying need an adult in their lives with whom they can identify and turn to in time of need. Communication among teachers was also considered an important factor in both prevention and dealing with student bullying. Several of the teachers said that parental involvement was a critical factor in addressing bullying and that the community was supportive of the school's efforts to deal with bullying when it arose. They also expressed the belief that the rural nature of the community was both a positive and negative force in dealing with bullying incidents. The positive aspects seemed to be in the closeness and heritage of the community and the fact that people know and trust each other. However, the negative view was that the small, rural community reflected intolerance of outsiders and ethnic minorities. When policies are being developed, teachers' voices must be considered as an integral part of the equation. In the next chapter these themes will be more fully developed through cross-case analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS PART II

Cross-Case Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' experiences with student

bullying in rural middle schools. The participants were teachers in five rural middle

schools who had experience in dealing with issues of student bullying in their schools.

According to Patton (2002) a cross-case analysis provides an examination of the common

patterns and themes that emerged from the individual cases. This chapter provides a

cumulative examination of the collective experiences of the teachers who participated in

the study. The results were divided into three domains: Teachers' Experiences with

Student Bullying; Interventions; and Professional Development and Participation in the

Development of Policy.

The first domain deals with teachers' actual experiences with student bullying in

rural middle schools and begins by providing a comprehensive look at bullying according

to the teachers' responses. Experiences are separated into the following sections: (a)

dimensions of bullying, (b) rural life and values, (c) victims who bring it on themselves,

(d) discrimination and harassment, (e) adolescent behavior and development, (f) the

secrecy of bullying, and (g) teacher's personal reflections. The seven main sections in the

first domain are divided into categories, and the categories are subdivided into common

themes.

The second domain deals with the interventions teachers have observed which

they feel are effective or ineffective. Interventions are divided into the following sections:

(a) teacher interventions, beliefs, and actions; (b) trusting relationship; (c) consultation

with counseling services; (d) small group and classroom interventions; (e) character education; (f) involving others; and (g) unsure how to handle the situation. The main sections of domain two are divided into categories and then subdivided into common themes.

The third domain deals with the kinds of professional development teachers have had to prepare them to deal with student bullying, and teachers' involvement in the development of school policy in relation to bullying. This part is divided into major sections related to the teachers' responses and are identified as follows: (a) level of anti-bullying professional development teachers have experienced, (b) absence of formal professional development, and (c) teacher involvement in the development of policy related to student bullying.

<div align="center">Teachers' Experiences with Student Bullying</div>

Dimensions of Bullying

The teachers I interviewed for this study had a wide range of experiences with student bullies, and their explanations of the meaning of the word *bullying* varied. Several major dimensions of bullying emerged from their stories: physical/mental power; subtle/overt behavior; group/individual; once/repeated; intentional/innocent. As with most human behavior, although the teachers could divide their experiences into dimensions of bullying, those experiences were not necessarily discreet or isolated categories; there was much overlap in what they observed. For example, in the physical category, there were interactions that involved physical behavior to induce emotional stress, and there were physical characteristics of bullies and victims. In general, the teachers described bully victims as students, who acted uncomfortable, appeared to be

easily threatened, who acted timid, or who were excluded by their peers. Bullies, in general, targeted their victims by focusing on a certain weakness and exploiting that weakness in a repeated fashion, whether intentional or not.

The teachers said the size of the bully could also play a major role in intimidating victims. They said students were often afraid to tell anyone about their bullying problems because their bullies were so much bigger than they were. They reported that sometimes a physically larger student would target one individual in the attempt to establish dominance over him or her. When this happened, the bullying could be relentless; even to the point of the victim becoming uncomfortable when the bully was anywhere in the vicinity. They said these kinds of bullying incidents were often hard to stop because in most cases, the bully had not done anything observable to the student other than simply being in his or her general location.

Although physical examples of bullying such as shoving, hitting, throwing things or spitting on others represent a serious problem in rural middle schools, the teachers in this study found that bullying caused mental stress through verbal or nonverbal actions. Name calling, verbal abuse, and exclusion were examples that they identified as ways students were victimized. The teachers agreed that, whenever a person somehow minimized another person in order to make himself or herself look better, bullying was taking place. They said bullying, whether physical or mental, could be damaging to students and could have a long term impact on their self-esteem, confidence and ability to be successful. Adam said "bullying crushes the victim's self-esteem." He said the point of bullying was to make the victim feel bad about him or herself. Jessica defined bullying as "finding a weakness in another person and exploiting it any way you can." Teachers in

the study suggested that bullies attempted to make their victims feel uncomfortable by victimizing, demoralizing, or belittling them.

According to these teachers, bullying could often be subtle as in the case of exclusion. They said students might simply decide to leave another student out of a group for whatever reason. Their responses also revealed that bullying could be overt and in the form of physical aggression toward one another. In either case, they said bullying could be damaging to the victim's overall self-image and could leave long-lasting harmful effects on their personalities. There are various reasons why students act in this way. Some teachers said students bullied others because they were trying to gain some sense of control and empowerment in their own lives. Others said that students bullied just because they wanted to be mean to others. In either case, they agreed that students who bullied often had the need to control and to exert their will over others.

In many of the interviews, teachers revealed that they too often faced bullying, sometimes by their own students. According to the teachers, middle-school students often blurred the lines between teacher and friend, especially when it came to teachers they really liked. Teachers said that sometimes the students acted inappropriately by identifying a teacher's differences and picking on him or her in the same way they would their peers. Although teachers conceded that they had to ignore a certain amount of this behavior, when the behavior became unacceptable to them, they reminded the students that what they were doing represented a form of bullying and that it would not be tolerated.

Teachers reported that bullying often happened in groups in which two or three friends singled-out another student in class or in another setting. Though they may not

physically harm their victims, teachers said students often mentally abused each other by trying to embarrass one another in front of others.

The teachers found that the students who were targeted were often smaller in stature, and incidents where larger boys were picked on did not happen as frequently. According to their observations, students enjoyed picking out each other's physical differences and focusing on them repeatedly. They said students verbally attacked one another by making hurtful and embarrassing comments, or they attempted to degrade each other by calling each other names. Barbara said of one student who was bullying others, "He would call the kids all kinds of names; I don't think he was physically threatening them, but he was definitely working to upset them."

The teacher interviews revealed the practice of intimidation as being a severe form of bullying which makes victims feel inferior to their bullying counterparts. They said students often attempted to harass their victims, especially through verbal means to the point that they were afraid to tell anyone for fear of reprisal from their attackers. Teachers observed that bullies were very good at targeting weaker students and were fully aware of the power they had over them. They said the more confident the bully became, the worse the intimidation became as was the case with a student who Charles said went so far as to urinate on his victims in the bathroom. According to the teachers, students who were verbally abusive also delighted in psychologically abusing their victims. They indicated that students may threaten others or act condescending toward their victims in addition to calling them names. Sometimes, according to the teachers, students intimidated others in an attempt to provoke them into an altercation. The teachers reported that said students often invaded their victims' personal space in an

attempt to get them to act in some physical way. The teachers remarked that, although the bullies did not always leave physical reminders of their bullying, they often left unmistakable reminders of their presence when it came to psychological bullying.

Teachers were quick to point out that not all students who were larger in size became bullies and that sometimes larger students actually became the victims. They said these students were often quiet and had a tendency to stay to themselves, and that often smaller students would target a larger student who may have few friends, be reserved, or who demonstrated introverted tendencies. Teachers said sometimes it became a game for the smaller student to establish dominance over the larger student if he or she saw an opportunity to get away with the behavior. They reported that bullying in this case often followed predictable patterns in that the bullies would use verbal bullying, laughing at the victim, or harassment to try to intimidate the larger student. They said sometimes the bullies would attempt to push or shove the larger student or say hurtful things in order to provoke a response. Teachers expressed concern about these types of victims and the consequences which may result from their being bullied. They said because of their larger stature, these victims had the ability to lash out at their smaller attackers after having to endure repeated bullying for a long period of time. Teachers reported finding that students who picked on larger victims might simply be reciprocating the problems they have had to endure themselves with bullies and that often students who bullied others have themselves been bullied by some other person or group of persons.

In their interviews, teachers stated that students were often bullied because they exhibited physical differences. They said students who wore different clothes or different hairstyles called attention to themselves and caused them to be targeted. They said

sometimes students at the middle-school age engaged in a kind of "mob mentality" in which they acted as a frenzied shark feeding on the differences of their victims. In a story told by Grace, one student in her class wore hearing aids and had what she described as a "disfigured nose." She said the student was constantly targeted throughout the year and stated, "Physical appearance is the main reason kids seem to target others. It could be something so slight that you and I wouldn't notice, but middle schoolers zoom in; especially the ones that are tuned in for bullying." She said students might highlight the differences by calling their victims names which related to their disabilities such as "flat nose." She recalled that sometimes the bullying escalated into a more physical nature when students threw things at one another or did things like spit on one another.

According to the teachers in the study, just as physical differences and size play a part in becoming a victim of bullying, some students were targeted because of their socioeconomic status. Teachers said these students often had to endure their peers making fun of them because they had less than their attackers. Teachers said these students might not wear the same kind of clothes or the clothes they have might not be as nice as the other students'. The teachers felt that they must always be on guard against this sort of intimidation and psychological bullying.

The teachers further suggested that bullying did not always happen between the bully and the victim; that sometimes outside influences could cause a situation to escalate. Interviews with teachers revealed that some students acted as instigators in an attempt to get others to do their will. Marie told the story of one student who phoned a friend and made an unfounded accusation about another student. As a result, a physical altercation took place at school the next day. To make matters worse, she said that, after

the incident was investigated, administrators found that the bullying student had brought a pellet gun to school in case he had to "back up" the other student involved in the altercation.

Teacher interviews revealed varying opinions about how widespread bullying actually is. Some teachers said most bullying involved a small number of students and that those students repeatedly bullied others. According to the teachers, these few students had never had the underlying reasons for their bullying addressed. The teachers agreed that schools should focus their initial efforts on helping students deal with and recognize why they bully others; otherwise, they said, the bullying would not stop.

Teachers said often bully victims were also victims at home, and it could be difficult to know how to help these victims when families could not or would not get involved. Grace said, "They don't see it as an issue because it may be initiating from there." Similarly, Helen reported in dealing with some bullying situations that she was at a loss as to how to deal with them. She said some students did not seem to want to be helped and some actually enjoy bullying others for whatever reason.

Rural Life and Values

According to teacher interviews, many bullying incidents occurred in rural communities and were discussed in the local press. The degree to which the rural environment contributes to bullying is a matter of varying opinion according to the teachers in the study. Some teachers said a strong sense of culture and respect for authority passed down from generation to generation lessened the amount of bullying that took place in rural middle schools. Many of the teachers surmised that there were fewer

incidents of bullying in rural middle schools than could be found in urban or suburban settings.

Other teachers in the study suggested that the same heritage contributed to bigotry and intolerance for other cultures, asserting that bullying was often overlooked or minimized in a "boys will be boys attitude" and that bullying was definitely a problem in rural middle schools.

Additionally, other teachers were not sure whether the rural environment had any effect on the amount of bullying that took place in middle schools. Teachers who were interviewed seemed to agree that lack of diversity and school size, not the geographical area, might contribute to fewer incidents of bullying than in larger, more diverse schools. Incidents of bullying seemed to become more frequent when there was an influx of outsiders entering the smaller, more sheltered, communities.

Some of the teachers in the study speculated that one reason for fewer bullying incidents in rural middle schools was the presence of a strong tradition of caring in the rural culture. Several teachers suggested that, in most rural communities, there existed a culture of tradition and respect for previous generations. One teacher in particular suggested that although the emphasis on education might vary from family to family, there was a deeply rooted respect for authority, which had been instilled from birth in most rural students. Adam said "I think part of our culture here is the way our culture views character and views honor. I think those views have been handed down from generation to generation." Teachers said the rural culture to which students are exposed helped them form positive views about how to treat others. They said most rural students understood the difference between right and wrong, which helped them to make positive

behavioral choices most of the time. According to the teachers, this rural heritage, accompanied with the fact that most rural schools were less populated than their urban or suburban counterparts, helped to decrease the number of bullying incidents in rural middle schools.

Teachers in the study reported that most rural students grew up with one another and spent most of their lives together. They reported that these rural students shared a common experience which helped to lessen the amount of bullying in rural middle schools. Kenneth said, "Whether they are gothic or a jock, they are still a country kid." Teachers suggested that rural culture and familiarity often promoted an attitude of respect and helped younger students develop relationships with older students. The teachers found that students often had the opportunity to participate in family and community events which further strengthened relationships with friends, family and community. According to the teachers, in rural schools, most students lived in the country and shared most of the same values and beliefs as their neighbors. They said the lack of diversity helped to keep students from being targeted because of their differences.

Several of the teachers who were interviewed suggested that, in the rural population, people were generally helpful to one another. Teachers said that most students were very forgiving and congenial to one another and that they tried to get along with one another because they were like-minded and did not have the dichotomy that some larger and less rural schools did. They said the rural culture had a way of drawing people in and bringing them together as long as they had similar values. In that sense, teachers said bullying was often looked upon negatively by rural culture. They found that the culture was often appealing to parents who wanted their kids to go to school in a safe

environment. One of the teachers said parents who tried to enroll their children in more urban schools often found that there were more incidents of bullying, that student discipline issues were more serious, and that students' attitudes were more negative than their rural counterparts.

Not all teachers who participated in the study believed that the rural environment had a positive impact on student bullying. These teachers said that, within the rural culture, there were sometimes darker values including racism and bigotry which showed up from time to time. Teachers remarked that they saw it as their job to try to redirect these negative aspects. Jessica used the term "forward thinking" to describe the way she tried to get her students to realize the importance of being racially and culturally tolerant. She asserted that rural traditions, however, were very deeply rooted and that change did not come easily because it was not always supported by the rural community. Additionally, she expressed the belief that the rural culture often promoted a sense of isolationism and that, although they were not usually negative to outsiders, rural people were generally suspicious and were not always receptive to outside influence. Teachers indicated that, in rural communities, people from a more urban type environment were often treated with mistrust; that there was often an attitude shared by the rural community members that urban people were more likely to be violent, mean and tough.

According to some teachers, even familiarity was no guarantee of positive student interactions. Some teachers reported that, in the rural culture, students had often known each other all of their lives and that this familiarity often resulted in students being targeted for incidents that occurred many years prior. They said bullies had the opportunity to bring up incidents from years past and to target students all over again.

The result, according to them, was often long-term victimization which could cause serious harm to the victim's self-esteem. These statements stand in direct opposition to the idea of a strong tradition of caring in the rural environment.

Teachers reported that the rural attitude often promoted the idea of a "pecking order," which unfairly minimized the bullying problem in rural middle schools by making it sound as though bullying was just a natural part of life. Teachers said they often became frustrated with this kind of thinking because it worked against their efforts to stop bullying. Linda said "'Boys will be boys'; I have heard that way too much." She said the rural culture often dismissed bullying as a part of life that students had to deal with that kids would get over being victimized, and that bullying was really not that bad in rural middle schools. According to teachers in the study, bullying was, in fact, an issue in rural schools and victims did, indeed, suffer from being bullied. Barbara stated, "On the negative side, we do have the ignorant person that says, 'Just punch him, Son. If he irritates you, you just go and punch him.'" She said some kids were raised with the attitude that "boys will be boys" and that they were never taught to address their problems by discussing them.

According to the teachers, many of the bullying problems found in rural environments stemmed from long-time feuds between families. They observed that, in rural settings, students' circles of friends were usually smaller, that students were more territorial with their friendships, and students often faced more competition for sports teams which may have promoted bullying related to parental pressure.

Teachers reported that most rural students and their parents had lived in these settings their entire lives. They worried that, as rural culture changed and became more

diverse and urbanized, bullying incidents would increase. They expressed a concern that different cultures would cause problems for a culture, which was built upon tradition. They said rural communities had traditionally been simpler, kinder, and gentler than urban settings, and that as rural culture changed, more rural kids were exhibiting a lifestyle that was closer to that of urban kids.

As an example, one teacher observed that in rural culture most boys traditionally carried pocket knives. She recalled that when she was a child in rural schools, sometimes the teacher would ask a student if he had his pocket knife with him because the teacher needed it for something. According to this teacher, carrying a knife is a deeply rooted tradition of being prepared in the rural culture. She said that although knives were once seen as a basic tool for survival, due to the current emphasis on school safety, knives were no longer allowed on school campuses. Having lost this piece of their culture, the teacher suggested that students were now eager to find another sense of belonging such as joining gangs and wearing bandanas to show group affiliation. Students often carried knives, she said, for different reasons than for the romanticized reasons she outlined. She observed that school personnel often found themselves busy trying to crack down on these kinds of issues because they promoted a gang-like atmosphere.

Some teachers said they did not think the rural environment made much of a difference when it came to bullying. According to Marie, "people are people and kids are kids." In other words, bullying is bullying no matter what environment in which it takes place. Teachers said that although the culture might be more protective of the students in rural areas, there were still a few kids who wanted to put others down to make themselves look better. They believed that sometimes the students acted in this way because they

were having problems at home. The teachers speculated that students, who were not

receiving enough attention at home, would do almost anything at school to receive

attention.

Victims Who Bring it on Themselves

According to the teachers in the study, students in rural middle schools often

acted in a way which caused them to become victims. They attributed this behavior to a

lack of social skills and an inability to address the bullying in a socially constructive way.

Teachers reported that these students often exhibited behavior which was confusing to

both students and teachers; behaviors, they felt, that might be an attempt to gain attention.

They found that these students often had an inability to read social cues which caused

them to be alienated from the group. They said these students viewed aggravating others

as inclusion when actually they were driving people away.

Teachers in the study agreed that middle school was a difficult time for students

and that their bodies and personalities were changing on a daily basis. Because of these

changes, teachers reported that students matured at different rates and that their physical

features, ability, and maturity could often times set these students apart from their peers.

They said that some students arrived at the middle school less mature than their peers and

that this often made them unable to deal with the middle-school culture in a way that was

acceptable. They observed that these students sometimes bragged about themselves or

tried to seem more important than they were in an attempt to gain attention. Teachers said

some of these students' friends who had grown up with them were able to simply "shrug

off" the offender's actions. However, there were some students, they found, who could

not tolerate their behavior. They said that these students often became targets for bullying because they lacked the social skills necessary to fit in with their friends.

Teachers reported having handled these situations in various ways. Some teachers said they simply told their students to ignore the annoying behavior, or to stay away from the kid who was irritating them. Charles recalled how, after witnessing one student annoying the other kids, he thought, "Why would you do that? It is just making it worse." He said that these children were generally reaching out for attention and thought that aggravating others was the only way they were going to get it. To them, he said, getting attention might be worth it, even if it meant being bullied.

Sometimes students who brought bullying on themselves were simply looking for what David called "shock value." He said their lack of social skills was the main reason they were targeted for bullying and added that they were not able to read social cues which resulted in their having difficulty fitting into the group. He found that these students could become "abrasive" to other students, which caused them to be targeted themselves. According to David, other students often did not respond well to this type of behavior and simply ignored these students. He asserted that, because of their own actions, the students would become increasingly isolated.

Teachers who were interviewed discussed other types of annoying behaviors that caused students to be targeted by bullies. Some examples included doing "gross" things at lunch in order to disturb other students, or making comments in class in order to gain attention. According to the teachers, these students mainly wanted to impress their friends and to fit in but did not know how. Being socially inept often led them to being picked on.

Teachers said that often students said things to anger other students. They reported that these students often argued with the things that other students said in order to start a conflict between them. Teachers found that often students began excluding them because of their behaviors and that, although they really wanted to make friends, because of their behaviors, other students excluded them. Teachers said that this type of immature behavior was common at the middle-school age. These types of situations were hard for the teachers to deal with because they could not understand why they would act in a way that caused them to be targeted. Linda said there had been times when she pulled students aside and said, "When you do this, it makes them angry, and that is not helping your situation with feeling bullied."

According to the teachers in the study, sometimes students became targets by trying to defend themselves against bullying. Often, they said, this type of behavior simply made the bullying worse, and no matter how many times teachers urged students to simply ignore their bullies, they adamantly attempted to defend their behavior, regardless of the cost. They said that some kids responded to being bullied verbally, and that some even physically, and that this type of retaliation often became a vicious cycle.

Teachers speculated that students who acted in this way might do so because they were having difficulty at home. Because these students craved attention, the teachers reasoned that they were not receiving enough at home, and that they compensated for a lack of attention at home by seeking it at school. Teachers reported that the students' behavior often led to being targeted for bullying by their peers.

Discrimination and Harassment

Racial bullying. Although there was some disagreement about the frequency of incidents, teachers who participated in the study suggested that racial bullying did occur in rural middle schools. In the predominately White schools represented in this study, teachers said that both Hispanic students and African-American students were often targeted by bullies. They said that the bullying happened in the form of name calling and intimidation and that it usually was based upon racial differences. According to the teachers in the study, victims, who were in the racial minority, often tried to ignore it or "laugh it off'" in an attempt to cover their true feelings of hurt. They speculated that the lack of diversity in many rural schools contributed to suspicion and lack of tolerance among rural White students. In addition, the issues of bigotry and suspicion of outsiders which, according to some teachers, were prevalent in the rural community fostered an atmosphere which could be conducive to racial bullying. Teachers said that differences in race and culture often led to divisions along racial lines with students of a particular group "banding together."

Many of the teachers who participated in the study said Hispanic students are often targeted for bullying. Some teachers reported believing that Hispanic students were teased but not harassed. Kenneth said, "It is still inappropriate, but it is not meant in quite as mean a spirit as bullying." Teachers said that some White students referred to their Hispanic peers using derogatory names such as "Paco," and that, even students who were only partially Hispanic were sometimes subjected to this same kind of verbal abuse. Teachers said that although students who were targeted for racial bullying were aware of the bullying taking place, they often played along with the mistreatment and tried to act

as though it did not bother them. The teachers said that the victims were often brought to tears when students picked at them and made fun of them in front of other students.

Because many of the Hispanic students lived in the same area, teachers said many incidents occurred on the school bus. They found that, even though victims were often subjected to verbal and even physical abuse, they were afraid to tell teachers about the abuse in fear of retaliation by the bullies.

Most of the schools represented in the study were primarily homogenous, and teachers felt that the lack of diversity helped to curb incidents of racial bullying. Teachers reported that, as Hispanic populations have begun to increase, they saw an increase in the number of incidents related to racial tension between Hispanic students and very rural White students. Teachers said that most tensions seemed to spark from differences between the very rural students and their attempts to deal with the Hispanic culture moving into the area. They suggested that parental view points, accompanied by the lack of exposure to a variety of cultures, caused some of the attitudes of racial intolerance. Teachers speculated that these rural students would have a difficult time adjusting if they were in a more diverse setting. Some teachers said that, in recent years rural schools had become more racially tolerant due to having more open-minded faculty members. They said that the addition of more "mature" and "cultured" teachers who appreciated diversity had had a strong impact on the culture of rural middle schools. Barbara said, "When I first started working there, even the principal used the word, *nigger*."

According to the teachers interviewed, bullying problems related to race, although limited, usually involved exclusion. The observed that Hispanic students and African-American students would not associate or socially interact with one another.

Teachers reported that, in these rural settings, it was often more socially acceptable to bully or to be mean to the Hispanic students than to the African-American students. They attributed this to negative news media coverage of illegal Hispanic immigrants. In general, teachers said that African-American culture was more readily accepted and believed that negative perceptions of illegal immigrants often permeated into the schools' culture with the prevailing attitude to be "mad" about illegal immigrants.

Teachers speculated that, perhaps out of necessity, Hispanic students tended to ban together for survival and familiarity. Helen reported, "The Hispanic students seem to stay very tightly together to themselves and they don't interact a lot with the White students." She said that problems often developed when White students made derogatory remarks classifying all Hispanic students into a single group. Teachers said that they often overheard racist remarks or comments from White students. One example they used was the term *Beaner*, which was a common slur that White students used for Hispanic students. They reported that conflicts sometimes began with verbal assaults and then escalated to more serious physical problems if they were left unchecked. Frances remembered an incident in which Hispanic students were targeted by what she called a "bunch of redneck boys." The Hispanic students retaliated with what she described as a "gang mentality," and all of the students were suspended. She said the administration, in response to this problem, attempted to place all of the Hispanic students in one English as a Second Language (ESL) class and that this type of response only further isolated the groups and caused gang-like behavior.

According to the teachers interviewed, not all of the bullying of Hispanic students was by White students. Many episodes of bullying occurred within the same racial

groups, whether they were White or Hispanic. Helen said she did not see many incidents of racial bullying in the sense of one group bullying another group.

African-American students were also reported to be subjected to racial bullying from time to time. Teachers observed that the bullies often used the terms *Ku Klux Klan*, or *KKK* in order to intimidate African-American students. Ingrid said she once witnessed a White male telling a Black female "Get your Black ass back into the classroom." As in the case of the Hispanic students, teachers said that African-American students who were mostly in the minority attempted to "laugh off" such incidents and to act as though the incidents did not bother them. However, teachers said they were able to recognize the pain when students were targeted.

In addition to Hispanic and African-American students, teachers reported that Asian students were also targeted by bullies from time to time. They said that sometimes bullies were not culturally aware and that they often targeted others because of their racial backgrounds; that because they might be culturally ignorant, they were unaware that their slurs and derogatory remarks were inappropriate. Marie remembered a student who targeted Asian students who he thought were Mexican. She said the bully would often make fun of Vietnamese students, calling them "slant eyes." Teachers said name calling and physical threats were often used to intimidate other students and that students of different nationalities were often targeted because of their physical features. Teachers speculated that much of the racial bullying problem in rural schools was a result of a growing immigrant population, and that many rural White students had difficulty accepting anyone different from themselves. This could be a reflection of the rural community and its hesitation to accept outsiders. Many of the teachers in the study

observed a divide between students of different racial backgrounds and asserted that the students felt more comfortable in groups of students most like themselves. They said that in class, there was not much of an issue with racial tension, but that in the hallways, at lunch, or other less structured situations, the divide was very noticeable.

Although most of the schools represented in the study were not racially diverse, teachers who were interviewed said episodes of race related bullying definitely happened. They reported that students of like racial backgrounds often banded together and did not associate with other racial groups during less structured times of the day. They found that the ever-changing culture of rural communities sometimes invited suspicion on the part of racial groups toward one another and might be enhanced by the suspicious nature of the rural culture itself. In her interview, Jessica suggested that the rural community promoted the idea of racial bullying and said, "We as teachers try to eliminate, racist or bigotry kind of attitudes, but you have generations of those attitudes working against you."

Bullying related to gender. According to the teachers interviewed, bullying occurred in middle school regardless of gender, stating that there were just as many incidents of female bullying as male bullying. Teachers said female bullying was often less overt and less likely to use physical means to bully others, whereas males were generally more aggressive physically. Teachers reported a tendency for females to use mental or emotional bullying such as verbal bullying and exclusion in order to victimize others. Males, on the other hand, often used name calling, pushing or shoving to intimidate their victims. Teachers reported that there were very few incidents of cross-gender bullying and that those incidents were often related to girls "flirting" with boys, or

boys taking up for a girlfriend against other girls. The fact that teachers did not mention any observances of sexual harassment may indicate that teachers did not perceive this type of harassment as bullying which indicate a need for professional development in that area.

The teachers believed that bullying was not gender-specific and that there was often a misconception that girls did not bully each other as often as boys. In fact, teachers observed that girls participated in bullying just as much and just as often as boys. They said that females often picked on each other because of the way they looked or because of jealousy over boys. The teachers found that girls tended to be less overt in their bullying, using verbal methods such as spreading rumors about one another.

Teachers said that female bullying was more subtle and often involved name calling, making fun of other females, or being part of a click that enjoyed that type of behavior. The teachers reported that girls would text or write notes to one another about someone "behind his or her back." According to the teachers, females were rarely physically confrontational but would fight if a situation reached a certain point. They reported that female bullying usually involved "a lot of drama" with often emotional or psychological consequences. The resolution of female bullying problems, they believed, could be very complicated in that solutions might only work for a short time. Frances suggested that girls were more severe in bullying and stated, "Little girls can be mean to each other."

The teachers interviewed in this study also reported a tendency for girls to use exclusion to target their victims and to isolate each other from groups. Grace said, "They will freeze the other girl out and not talk to her, not let her be in their little click." In

addition, she said they often involved other students by getting their friends to isolate the

victims as well. Teachers said that in middle school, friendships changed on a daily basis,

and that a student might be excluded from the group one day but be included the next.

They felt that there was often no logical reason behind the change and that they could be

the result of something that happened the same day or something that happened two years

ago. Linda said she does not see many boys saying, "Hey, let's not be friends with so and

so today, they are not my friend," whereas she reported observing a tendency for girls

"do it all the time."

Teachers reported feeling that female bullying was more difficult to deal with

because it was often hard to determine what had happened between the victim and the

bully. They said students were sometimes not aware that they were bullying others,

which suggested that the students had the perception that, unless a physical altercation

took place, it was not true bullying. They said students do not realize that emotional

bullying could be just as devastating. Teachers reported that girls tended to be "pettier"

and to "hang on to issues for longer periods of time" than boys. Girls, they reported, often

held grudges and, as Helen said, "keep at something until they see a response from their

victim that they like." Helen added that female bullying could be just as serious and that

although they do not often use physical methods, females could be just as cruel.

According to the teachers in the study, male bullying was more observable than

female bullying because males were more often physically aggressive. Teachers reported

witnessing male students shoving each other, making crude comments to one another, or

calling others derogatory names. They felt that it was often easy to spot bullying with

males, and that most of the time, males would "move on" once the situation was over.

Teachers said that a lot of male bullying took place in the locker rooms, and that male students often were picked on because they were not as big as the other boys, or because they looked different in some way. They cited as an example, male students who did not have as much hair on their arms or things of that nature. Marie suggested that organized sports contributed to bullying in that through sports, boys were taught to be aggressive. She believed that often this aggressiveness manifested itself through bullying.

Teachers said that cross-gender bullying did exist in rural middle schools but that it was not as common as girl-on-girl or boy-on-boy bullying. They reported that occasionally, two girls would get into a dispute in which one would enlist the help of her boyfriend to help pick on or tease the other girl. David recalled one example which took place at an intramural basketball game. The incident which started, he said, with students teasing each other, escalated to involve the entire school after someone sent threatening text messages outside of school. In general, however, teachers said cross-gender bullying was not very common and that most incidents of this type were students simply flirting with one another. They said that often boys would flirt by teasing girls and that girls would tease the boy in return. Teachers felt that it was often difficult to determine whether the behavior was bullying or just the students' way of trying to relate to the opposite sex.

There were, however, rare cases involving a female student picking on a male student. Jessica told the story of a male who was targeted by a female student and explained that the male was raised in a very intellectual family and never fought back against the girl although the girl would pick on him until he became very frustrated and emotional, which often made the situation worse. Jessica recounted the male student's

comments to her: "I know they are just being stupid, and it's not necessarily something personal between the two of us, but it's still irritating and frustrating, and I don't know how to tell this person."

Students with disabilities. Teachers reported that students with disabilities sometimes became the targets of bullying in rural middle schools. Teachers also said that incidents involving general-education students picking on special-education students were rare. According to Elaine, special-education students who were most frequently involved in bullying were listed as "Learning Disabled." Elaine added that she did not think students knew which of their peers had a disability.

Teachers who participated in the study said that there were often more bullying cases involving special-education students than general-education students, and that in most cases, both bullies and their victims were special education students. They reported that cases which involved general-education students bullying special-education kids were not as frequent.

Teachers felt that the special education students involved in bullying usually had discipline issues or very low test scores. Teachers cited a lack of role models within that particular group of students and that they had no one " to look up to." They said these students were often "lumped" together with others of varying disabilities and experiences, which often resulted in bullying.

Linda recalled an incident which she described as, "the worst case of bullying I've ever seen." The incident involved a female student who performed very poorly academically, and who the teacher described as a "very affectionate kid." She recalled how one day, while she was monitoring the hallway, the female student came down the

hall crying. She stopped the student and asked what had happened to which the student

replied, "They were mean to me." When the teacher asked who had been mean to her, the

student said, "The boys in P.E." The teacher's investigation of the incident revealed that

several boys had taken basketballs and had thrown them at the girl repeatedly. The

student had large, red marks all over her body where the balls had struck her.

Adolescent Behavior and Development

Popularity. According to the teachers in the study, the issue of being "popular"

with peers often led to bullying problems in rural middle school. They reported that

middle-school students strived to be recognized by their peers as one of the "popular

kids." They said that most incidents of bullying associated with popularity did not

involve students who were already considered popular; rather they involved the students

who were striving to achieve that status. Teachers speculated that students bullied others

because they were insecure or because they did not have a lot of friends, and that they

might see bullying others, not as a way to hurt others, but as a way to increase their own

popularity.

Teachers said that students who bullied others often did so because they were

struggling to be recognized socially. They stated that because the students attended small

and rural schools, many of them had known each other for most of their lives. They

reported that as students changed in the middle-school years, they began to form

friendships with other students. They said that sometimes students felt excluded for

various reasons and that they began trying to regain popularity that they had once had.

Teachers said that students got along better when they were younger, because as they

grew up, they changed and made new friends, which was often frustrating to students in the middle-school years.

According to the teachers interviewed, bullies actually were more popular with their friends, at least in the beginning of their bullying. They believed that students bullied others to gain popularity, or to look "cool" in front of other students. Elaine remarked, "Bullies crave social status." Teachers reported that popularity was extremely important to middle-school students and that they often followed a kind of "pack mentality" in that they needed to be part of a group. Even if the student was "the low person on the totem pole," teachers found that, if students were part of a group, they were happy. The teachers agreed that students sometimes hung out with students who had bullied them in the past, which underscored the fact that being a part of a group was often more important than the bullying they had to endure. According to the teachers, even students who played on the same sports teams could become involved in bullying simply because one student was considered to be more popular than others. Teachers expressed fear that minor incidents that were left unchecked would result in more physical altercations, which could be dangerous.

Puberty. Teachers who participated in the study acknowledged the fact that students experienced physical, mental, and emotional changes while in middle school and that these changes often contributed to bullying. They found that students did not usually understand the changes they were experiencing and often did not know how to deal with them. As a result, teachers observed that the students' experienced frustration, which caused them problems among other students. They suggested that students were often confused and unable to deal with situations in a logical way. Students just beginning to

discover differences in their bodies, they reported, picked on one another due to athletic ability or body shape; this kind of bullying, they said, could be mentally or emotionally traumatizing. In addition, teachers observed that students experienced these changes on a daily basis, making it difficult for teachers to design effective interventions for bullying. They felt that the onset of puberty often led to jealousy and problems relating to members of the opposite sex.

According to the teachers, the physical, mental, and emotional changes that middle-school students endured played a role in middle-school bullying. Students generally felt awkward physically, mentally and emotionally and did not have the social skills to know what to do or say in certain situations. Often, according to the teachers in the study, students looked silly to others, making them a target for bullying. Kenneth said, **"This age is really hard. It's a tough age to teach, and it's a tough age to live through."** He said that children were often confused and that their emotions changed from minute to minute. Helen added, "They will be crazy about somebody one day and then hate them the next. And then the next day, they are best friends again and clinging to each other as they walk down the hall." Given the circumstances, the fact that bullying happens so frequently at this age is not surprising. Teachers said it would be difficult to completely eliminate bullying in rural middle school because of the volatility of the age. They reported that the solutions that worked today may not work next week and that it was very difficult to deal with a problem when the problem was constantly changing.

According to the teachers in the study, students at the middle-school age were beginning to think about things they had never thought about before, academically, socially, and sexually. Students' bodies and personalities were beginning to change, and

they were beginning to notice other people in a different way; particularly, members of the opposite sex. They said students began to develop crushes at this age and that; eventually jealousy became an issue, which often led to bullying for who gets the most attention. Teachers said students developed a "pecking order" which was motivated by who was a friend with whom, particularly among girls.

Because students were confused by the changes they were experiencing, teachers believed that the students at this age did not have the maturity to deal with problems in the way that older children did. They reported that middle school was a difficult time in a child's life and that it was difficult to be with that many students of the same age and same level of confusion. In addition, teachers felt that the problems students faced at home sometime spilled over into the school environment, causing students to direct their anger and frustration toward other students in the form of bullying. They said that the middle-school environment provided a lot of opportunities for students to bully one another.

Because of hormonal changes and the onset of growth spurts, teachers suggested that teasing often took place because of physical size. They reported issues such as changing clothes in P.E. and in locker rooms often led to bullying because students, especially boys, noticed each other's physical differences. Teachers said boys often teased each other because of size or physical prowess but that both male and female students teased each other as a way to deal with the awkwardness they were experiencing in their own bodies. Teachers observed how students picked on each other to take the focus off of themselves. Helen said it made them "feel better about themselves if they can put somebody else down".

Friends. According to the teachers in the study, sometimes bullying occurred as a result of simple horse-play among friends. Often, problems arose when students innocently played with one another in an aggressive manner until the situation "got out of hand." Teachers believed that this kind of aggressive play, when allowed to continue for a long period of time, could lead to students to reacting violently although other students perceived it as innocent "kidding around."

Teachers observed that bullying sometimes involved students who had at some point been friends. They said that when students began to get more aggressive with one another, sometimes situations escalated and altercations occurred. Jessica told a story of one such incident in which a student's eye socket was crushed, and the parents threatened lawsuits against one another. She said animosity was often built up between students and that the results could lead to physical incidents of bullying. To make matters worse, teachers reported that many incidents of this type took place after school and were difficult to prevent.

Teachers said bullying even took place among teammates and felt that coaches played an important role in stopping this kind of behavior, adding that it was crucial for coaches to encourage their students to be a team on and off the court. Linda said they should "encourage each other and help each other and build each other up instead of cutting each other down."

According to the teachers, problems appeared to be less serious than they really were. Grace told a story about an incident involving a male student who was physically larger than the students who had been picking on him. The student had been teased most of the year and had endured all that he could before finally exploding on the students who

had been harassing him. Teachers reported that students who were quiet and kept to themselves were often difficult to assess; it was difficult to know when and if the students had reached a point of lashing out at their attackers. Teachers said their best opportunities for de-escalation occurred when they could communicate with parents frequently and could counsel the students often.

Some teachers said students simply bullied others when given the opportunity. They said these students were not able to handle a less structured environment. Despite the fact that they may be friends in most situations, teachers found that if certain situations allowed them the opportunity to victimize someone, they would take advantage of it. Grace reported that her class often went outside for exercise after lunch. She said inevitably, horse-playing ensued and could manifest into bad situations. She observed that students who wanted to bully others intentionally lagged behind the group so that they could throw rocks at their victims.

Social groups. Teachers suggested that incidents of bullying involving differences between social groups of students were infrequent with the exception of what teachers call "simple cliques." For the purpose of this study, examples of social groups might include athletes, academics, Goths, nerds, band kids, or any other group outside of race and culture which represented a division among students. These groups might also be subdivided into smaller groups such as football team members and/or soccer players. In most cases, teachers said that the students had grown up together and did not demonstrate major differences, even if they identified or belonged to different social groups. One teacher identified social groups as contributing to bullying, while all other teachers said they did not see evidence of a major issue relating to social group bullying.

According to the teachers in the study, middle-school students view school groups and friends as being very important. They said kids bullied other kids more for affirmation and acceptance from their peers than for any other reason, and that bullying occurred in every social group whether it was the jocks, the academically minded kids, or other groups. In other words, bullying was an issue that took place across the spectrum of every situation and social group.

Teachers reported not seeing many incidents of bullying related to social groups and that, at the middle-school level, students tended to have friendships that they had cultivated prior to middle school. Issues such as athletics and popularity were overshadowed by the students' long history together. They said that bullying was more individual than group oriented and that it tended to be caused by other. Teachers attributed the lack of bullying among social groups to the students' understanding of one another. In general, they found that groups of kids got along pretty well and respected one another's differences. Adam said, "We have really good kids here in this county." He said that although some students singled themselves out for attention, most were very helpful, and that if they were not bothered, they would not bother others.

Although there was not much evidence of group-based bullying, teachers said such bullying sometimes began when students developed "cliques." They said this type of behavior was more prominent in male students who often had the ability to make others look up to them. Teachers said the students who were chosen as leaders did not always appear to be logical choices and that often students chose as their leaders the very students who bullied others on a frequent basis.

According to Jessica, bullying incidents were often related to the fact that students originated from various communities represented within the school district. She reported that in some counties students competed against each other in local youth league sports teams throughout elementary school, only to be placed on the same teams when they reached middle school. The differences were not drastic, and according to teachers, these differences did not last long. Jessica added that the differences among students seemed to disappear after students had been in middle school together for a short time.

Some school districts represented in the study had intermediate schools which teachers said served to ease overcrowding and to act as a "prepping school" for students before they reached middle school. Teachers suggested that because students were together in these intermediate schools, unless they were new to the area, differences related to sections were usually addressed by the time they reached middle school.

Interviews with teachers revealed that in most of the rural middle schools represented in the study, students worked well together. Although there was some of the "jock versus nerd" separation, teachers suggested the separation was usually on the part of the students who did not want to participate in sports. They said that these students sometimes distanced themselves from others and tended to stay to themselves because they were not part of a group. Because of the age and the overall lack of maturity, teachers said there was often misunderstanding among middle-school students, which could be eliminated by simply communicating with one another. They reported that incidents involving one group bullying another group were rare.

One teacher said she had seen differences between groups in her school. Barbara recalled an example of a certain football coach who called the soccer players "grass

fairies." She said that this was an isolated event, however, and that she does not see that sort of behavior taking place anymore. Teachers said students sometimes identified differences due to social groups and picked on each other because of those differences. Because of students' similar religious beliefs and backgrounds, their common culture and race, and other common backgrounds, teachers felt that differences among the students came in the form of social groups and that sometimes those differences were exploited.

Pack leaders. According to the teachers in the study, middle-school students who bullied others were lacking a certain amount of control in their own lives, which led them to want to control others. By bullying others and becoming the "leader" of a group, students who bullied others, the teachers found, gained a sense of self-confidence in a negative way. The teachers speculated that these students bullied others because they experienced problems at home or because they had seen someone in their family act in the same way.

Teachers said the issue of dominance was prevalent in middle school and that often bullies targeted their peers because they infringed upon the bully's territory by trying to be included or by competing for the role of pack leader. Adam gave a good example of a female student who he described as having a "very strong personality, very social, very dramatic." He said she traveled in a specific group or "pack" of female students and served as the unofficial leader. Her home life appeared to be solid, but her parents were not very supportive of her teachers' efforts. The student targeted students who threatened her circle of friends. He said she feared losing influence over the students in her pack and would even target lifelong friends if they threatened her leadership position within the group.

Teachers reported that groups of students often had one student who functioned as the "lead bully," and others who worked together ganging up on one or two other kids. They said that these students might also work to be a nuisance in class in an attempt to disrupt learning. Teachers felt that these friendships often developed into a gang-type mentality and that students felt they could gain power by following the lead bully. Teachers said the leader manipulated the rest of the students into doing what he or she wanted by using his or her influence as a form of control giving them status among their peers. According to Jessica, these students know that they can "cause someone else to cry, to react in any way, whether it is emotionally, with the crying, or physically with fists." She added that their main objective was to have control over someone else. She speculated that this could be attributed to the bully's lack of control in his or her own life. Kenneth remarked, "They decide they don't like some kid for whatever reason and then one or a couple of them will do the bullying, whether it is verbal or pushing a little in the hallways."

Teachers found that bullies were usually easy to spot by the reactions other students had toward them and that students normally avoided bullies. Sometimes, however, teachers observed that students befriended bullies in order to avoid being picked on. . These students often found themselves the target of verbal abuse, according to the teachers, and because the abuse was not physical, the teachers did not see it as bullying. Teachers said bullies were often jealous and did not like to share their friends with anyone else.

Teachers said that sometimes students became bullies because of the patterns they saw demonstrated by their parents. They suggested that students often developed negative

social skills by being belittled or witnessing another person being belittled at home. According to teachers, these students often lashed out at school in an attempt to regain the control they did not have at home; they targeted another student in order to make themselves feel better. Teachers said bullies were often unhappy with their home life and were sometimes the victims of unfortunate circumstances. The teachers believed that bullying students often reacted to these negative situations by projecting a need for control of others. Elaine said, "I would say that, in most cases, they have been picked on before and they see it as just kind of 'picking somebody I can bully too.'"

Teachers said that sometimes students who were bullied reciprocated by bullying other, smaller students. Frances told a story about a student whose body odor caused him to have difficulty getting other students to work with him in class. She said the other students often picked on him and left him out of things, but outside of class, he would pick on younger, smaller students.

The Secrecy of Bullying

Places in which bullying occurs. According to the teachers who participated in the study, middle-school bullying most frequently occurred in less supervised areas or in transition-type situations. Class changes, hallways, restrooms, cafeterias, locker rooms, and school buses were places teachers identified where bullying frequently occurred. In addition, and to a lesser extent, teachers said bullying also took place in elective classes such as P.E. or in regular classrooms depending upon the amount of structure provided by the teacher. Any area in which teachers found it difficult to adequately supervise was subject to student bullying, according to them. They reported that serious bullying issues often happened after school where teachers were not present.

Teachers reported that bullying was not place-specific and that it could happen anywhere there was less supervision. They said that bullying also occurred on school trips and even on sports teams. Teachers identified school buses as a prime location for bullying. In a few rural counties, teachers reported that students shared buses with high-school students, which placed sixth graders with high school students and often led to problems with bullying. Ingrid recalled an incident which happened on the bus and involved a male student who threatened to "hang" a female student of a different race.

According to the teachers, bullying was less frequent when students were with their core teachers. They said more incidents occurred when students were in P.E., in an elective class, or in some other setting where students were put together in a different combination. Barbara said that because of her classroom's location near the locker room, she was frequently called to that area in order to stop bullying behavior. Most bullies have what Charles described as a "street smart" about them in that they knew how to get away with bullying. He said that although bullies eventually were caught, they were smart enough to know when and where to bully others.

Teachers reported that most of their schools required teachers to be in the halls or at their classroom doors to monitor students. They said sometimes a teacher's presence could keep a lot of negative behaviors from taking place. They found that sometimes, however, teachers were "stuck" at their desks trying to help a student with a problem, making it difficult for them to monitor students in that situation. They reported that bullying could be subtle, and sometimes students simply walked up to another student, called him or her a derogatory name and then continued down the hall as if nothing had happened. Teachers said it was very difficult to monitor everything kids did during the

less structured times because there might be 200 students moving between the rooms in the hall. They said they couldn't watch all of the students at the same time.

Teachers said that bullying took place most often during transitions. In the core classrooms, they said there was often more structure and that the pace was so fast that students do not have time to bully one another. Although bullying did occur in the classroom from time to time, teachers reported that it was not nearly as frequent as it was in transition or less structured times. Teachers reported that problems often occurred when students were moving from one class to another or from building to building.

According to teachers, the amount of bullying in the classroom depended upon how structured the class was. Even in an academic class, they said there could be drama between students. Teachers said most of the incidents that occurred in the classroom involved things like an "under-the-breath" comment while the teacher was helping another student or was distracted for some reason. They said many of the incidents that turned into serious bullying problems began in less structured classrooms and then spilled over into the other classes. Teachers said bullies were aware of what they could and could not do while teachers were present and that they often bullied others when no authority figures were present.

Cyberbullying. According to the teachers who were interviewed, cyberbullying was an increasingly important issue in rural middle schools. Teachers reported that students often bullied each other using cell phones or e-mail to send pictures of themselves or their friends to other students. These pictures often showed students in less-than-favorable situations such as without clothing. In addition, teachers said students often targeted other students by sending threatening or negative messages through cell

phones. Because most cyberbullying took place off campus, they said that it was very difficult for teachers to do anything to stop it. In some cases, they said they had advised parents to contact law enforcement.

Teachers suggested that cyberbullying was becoming a major issue nationwide. Due to school policies and the difficulty teachers had in policing behaviors which originated at home or off campus, most teachers reported that they did not see a lot of cyberbullying on school grounds. They felt that although technology was a useful tool, they believed it was part of their jobs to educate people on how to use it.

In some ways, teachers said they thought technology was the worst thing that to happen to bully victims because bullying messages could be spread immediately to a large group of people. As an example, teachers said students could send a threatening or otherwise derogatory text to 300 people or more instantly. With available technology, they said bullying had been taken to a new level. Kenneth recalled one example of a picture of a boy eating a banana, which he said was manipulated into a vulgar image and then spread to others electronically.

According to the teachers, one of the ways students bullied each other electronically was through phone texting. Although most schools did not allow phones to be used during the day or in the classrooms, teachers said students often came to school and discussed with their teachers and each other things that happened the night before. They said there was also quite a bit of "My Space," Facebook," and other social internet site bullying taking place among students. Charles recalled an incident where a student put a list of student's names he did not like on his MySpace page. He said he did not like them because they wore brands such as Abercrombie and Hollister. He then told his

friends that they should not like these people because they were the type of people that one did not want to befriend. He added that often that kind of bullying went unnoticed because it was hard for kids to access the internet at school, and the schools did not check students' MySpace pages or their text messages.

Teachers reported that students in their schools had been caught sending "crude" messages to one another which included vulgar or pornographic messages. They said they also threatened each other and called each other names through texting. Teachers reported that students often came to them because someone had sent a derogatory text message about them or someone else. Barbara recalled an incident in which one student took a picture in a hoodie and sent it out to all of her friends. The message said: "Don't vote for this other person for homecoming queen because she sucks. Vote for me." She also talked about a student who began cutting herself and taking pictures and posting them on the internet. She said there were a lot of kids who were really upset about the incident.

According to the teachers, most of their schools did not allow the use of cell phones or texting at school and if students were caught, their cell phones would be confiscated resulting in parents having to come to school to get the phones back. However, teachers said students still found a way to text each other constantly and that sometimes teachers cannot even see it happening. They said students sometimes wore sweatshirts with large pockets so that they could sit in class and text each other undetected. Teachers also stated that students used the cameras on their cell phones to take photos of kids doing something, and then manipulated the photo to turn it into whatever they wanted. They said that the students then forwarded the pictures and that

the students in the photo were often unaware that the photo had been taken in the first place.

According to teachers, students at the middle-school age often lacked the judgment or the forethought necessary to avoid the lure of attention that sending these picture messages affords them. They said that incidents had occurred in which photos were taken of girls without clothing and sent to other students. Helen recalled an incident in which a female student got in trouble because she sent a photograph of herself in her underwear to a boy. Similarly, Linda recalled an incident where a student showed her a picture he had taken of a girl at the pool. She said that although the picture was not necessarily indecent, she did not think that the girl in the photo would have wanted her cleavage to be permanently stored on his phone. Teachers said there was cause for concern because there were so many different mediums students could use to bully others. They worried that students did not understand the long-range implications of what they were doing when they sent threatening or explicit pictures.

Teachers asserted that cyberbullying was very difficult to stop and suggested that because students were so comfortable with technology meant that cyberbullying could happen more often than teachers or parents were aware. As long as students had access to cell phones, teachers believed students could be exposed to a variety of bullying-type situations. Teachers added that parents often did not know how to help when it came to cyberbullying issues. According to the teachers who were interviewed, outside of taking away technology such as cell phones, iPods, and computers, there was really nothing teachers or parents could do to address cyberbullying.

Teachers suggested that the introduction and availability of new technologies made it possible for students to bully one another in new ways, and that cyberbullying through cell phones and e-mail was a problem in rural middle school. Because cyberbullying was so difficult to track, teachers felt that it was unclear how much cyberbullying was actually taking place. Teachers said that they were often at a loss as to how to deal with the problems associated with cyberbullying and that their schools were working to develop new policies to address the issue.

Alienation. Teachers reported that students often bullied each other through exclusion from social groups. They said exclusion was a form of bullying predominately practiced by female students. Teachers suggested that, for middle school students, belonging to a group was extremely important and being excluded or shunned could be psychologically damaging. Given the choice, they said many students would rather be bullied than be excluded.

According to the teachers who were interviewed, one of the most frequent types of bullying issues involved students in the form of relational aggression. Often, teachers said female students who were usually led by a female student with a very strong personality would randomly pick someone else to alienate from the group. They said the entire purpose of the group was to make it difficult for the person they targeted to make friends with anyone else. According to teachers, this form of bullying was very difficult for students especially at this age because there was a strong need to develop friendships for their psychological well-being. Linda said, "Belonging is more important than anything in their minds." Students would rather be picked on than to be without friends. She added that even students with more introverted personalities felt it was very

important to have someone with whom they had something in common or someone to hang out with.

Teachers reported that students were often excluded for reasons related to physical differences. Frances told the story of a student who had a slight speech impediment in the form of a lisp that resulted in him being targeted for bullying. The student was targeted throughout the year and excluded from any sort of social interactions. Similarly, Grace described one student who was beaten up on the bus because he exhibited feminine-type behavior. She also told a story of a second student who wore hearing aids and desperately tried to fit in with the other students. Although the boys did not really bully him, several of the girls targeted him because they saw him as weak and as an easy target. The boy was excluded from a lot of social circles because of his disability.

Teachers said students could also be excluded from social groups simply because they were "different," and that kids who had problems with hygiene or body odor were often made fun of and consistently left out of social circles. Although these students may have had wonderful personalities and eventually may have even developed friends, teachers said they continued to be excluded as long as their differences persisted. They said alienation was a form of bullying which hit middle-school students extremely hard.

Victim behavior. According to teachers, there was no prerequisite for being a bullying victim in rural middle schools. However, they said many victims were often quiet and kept to themselves. They were generally soft-spoken and had few friends which, according to teachers, in some ways made them easy targets.

Teachers reported that some victims had a strong sense of self-confidence which caused them to be targeted because other students were jealous of them in some way. They said others had no self-confidence and appeared to be "defeated." They reported that students who were victims often appeared weaker in some way, or exhibited some physical difference which caused them to be targeted.

Teachers said some victims had physical similarities in that they were smaller, not necessarily outspoken, and in most cases did not have a lot of friends. They said these victims often made themselves easily available for torment. But in other cases, teachers said kids who were victims seemed to be fairly well-adjusted. They said bullies were sometimes threatened by the self-confidence those students possessed and targeted them. According to the teachers, there was no single reason a student became a target. One commonality teachers reported that victims often share was that they were sometimes outsiders. They had either moved to the school as a new student or they were not socially in tune with their peers. Teachers said bullies tended to find these students as easy targets. This observation was supported by teachers' responses which stated that racial slurs were often "laughed away."

Teachers reported that students who were victims acted meek or as Kenneth said, they may do "weird things that are not considered cool." At the middle-school age, teachers said it was very important to fit in and to do the right thing and to know the right people. When kids do not fit in, they stuck out, and teachers said that was usually when they were picked on.

In a lot of cases, teachers said victims were fairly intelligent, or academically strong. Usually these students were isolated and would not make any attempts to talk to

teachers or to other students. They might have a small group of close friends and would stick to themselves.

Teachers said they could often determine whether a student was a bully victim because of his or her posture. Linda said, "Rarely are bullied children confident looking." She said it was difficult for a student to hold his or her head up high if they felt like a victim. She said students who were victims often carried themselves in a defensive-type posture as if they were expecting something to happen to them. In addition, she said victims sometimes lost interest in their personal grooming because the bullying hurt their self-esteem. According to her, these students projected a defeated attitude, which often caused them to be targeted further. To add to their troubles, teachers said sometimes victims were smaller than the other students and were not good at athletics. They might appear nervous; they might not perform well academically, and they often exhibited poor attendance. Teachers found that they sometimes appeared sad, had a kind of "down-and-out look," and did not act like they were part of the group. They also said that they sometimes appeared isolated and that they might eat lunch alone. Typically, teachers said students who were picked on were quiet and that others saw them as easy targets.

Not all victims suffered from self-esteem issues. Teachers said sometimes these students were just different from the ones who were picking on them. Jessica recalled one victim in particular who was multi-racial and had darker skin which made her a target. She said she attributed her victimization to the rural area in which they lived, as well as to the values which were promoted in that area. She said the student really did not have any problems with her self-image; the problem was other students continuously saying things to her because she looked different.

Teachers said some victims seemed to make an effort to call attention to themselves in some way. Elaine said, "Sometimes they are a just little bit different, they kind of march to a different drummer." Often, while everyone in class was working on one assignment, she said victims would often be doing something else. She said this kind of behavior called attention to the student and might have caused him or her to be targeted by others for being different. She said sometimes these students would make "off the wall comments" that other students considered strange.

According to the teachers in the study, bully victims came in all shapes and sizes in rural middle schools. Some victims were self-assured while others had poor self-esteem. Some were academically gifted while others carried themselves in a defeated posture. Some victims were targeted because of racial issues, and some because of their athletic ability. Teachers said it was difficult to provide a typical portrait of a common victim of bullying. They said as teachers, they had to be alert when looking for bullying victims and to address their needs on a case-by-case basis.

Teachers' Personal Reflections

Many of the teachers who participated in this study were once victims of bullying themselves, either as children or as adults. Those who identified themselves as victims said their experiences had helped them in dealing with student bullying. Because they knew what to look for and how to identify bullying tendencies, they said they had an advantage when it came to stopping bullying behaviors. These teachers said they experienced bullying due to their own physical differences, or because they were younger and smaller. In one incident, a teacher said she was held captive in her classroom by a bullying student.

Teachers who have had to endure being a victim of bullying said that, because of their personal experiences, they were better able to understand what bullied students experienced. They also said they were able to identify bullying situations quicker than their colleagues who had not had those experiences. Jessica said, "I think I am a little more aware of some stuff just because I knew to look for it when I was growing up." These teachers said they understood what to look for in students who were simply looking for a target to bully. They also said they were very aware of coping strategies and could serve as good resources for students who had been victimized.

Teachers who participated in the study believed that most everybody had been bullied at some point during their lives, and that people who had physical differences have probably had to endure more than those who society considered to be "normal." Grace said she was born with a cleft palate and could remember being bullied frequently in school. She said she could remember being little and while riding the school bus, a boy would say, "take out your teeth." Because of her cleft palate she was unable to grow teeth. Teachers who have had to endure such abuse said they were more empathetic and more aware of victim's suffering. Because of their ability to detect bullying in its earliest stages, these teachers said they often tried to use prevention when dealing with bullying issues as opposed to waiting until a situation went too far. One particular strategy cited by the teachers in the study involved having students write about bullying and sharing their thoughts with the administration. Conscientious teachers said they often involved students in the process of coming up with solutions to bullying. Although they have had similar experiences with bullying, teachers said feedback and input from students made solutions more relevant to what they lived through each day. They said it also served to

empower victims who suffered from self-esteem issues. Grace said she sympathized with these students and often told them "It's tough, but we will help you get through it, get you some coping strategies."

Because of the pressures middle-school students who were victims go through, teachers who in their youth were victims themselves, said there was a need for schools to address bullying on a daily basis. Some of the teachers said they would like to teach a class on self-esteem to kids who have been bullied. They said it was important for students to understand how to avoid the stress of school and bullying issues instead of worrying so much. Ingrid said, "I know as an adult, it has taken me a long time to get over some of the things that happened because of my oldest brother." Teachers who have been in these same situations as children said they could identify with their students on a personal basis and said they played a crucial role in helping them deal with victimization.

Teachers said students often had difficulty determining the difference between playing and bullying, and that even if the intent was innocent; the actions of students could be degrading and hurtful to students if they were targeted. Veteran teachers, especially ones who had experienced personal bullying said they were better able to deal with the subtleties of students bullying. Also, teachers who were parents said they were sometimes better able to relate to students who were being victimized. Teachers cited a certain "teacher maturity" which they said came from actually experiencing certain situations first hand. They said teachers who were less seasoned often had difficulty understanding the appropriateness of the teacher-student relationship and what acceptable behavior was for students. They said behavior included both physical and overt bullying, and sometimes less experienced teachers did not understand bullying and that it scared

them. Teachers who have been victims said they were able to spot student behaviors that could potentially cause problems, whereas other teachers were not always as perceptive. Interestingly, the teachers who said they were victims acknowledged that students, through their own behavior, often brought bullying upon themselves.

Teachers said sometimes they experienced being bullied themselves and in their own classrooms. Barbara recalled an experience she had with a seventh-grade student whom she described as "extremely unstable." She said the student began skipping other classes and coming to her classroom even though she continuously told her not to. One day the student came to her room during a sixth-grade class where there was a boy she was stalking. She said the student would not let the teacher get to the phone to call the office, and she would not leave the room. The teacher finally had another student sneak out the back door and get a teacher from a neighboring classroom. The other teacher went to the office and told them what was going on. She said the situation continued for more than 20 minutes and that no one from the office ever came to address the situation in her classroom.

Teachers who have experienced bullying said they often have little tolerance for bullies or bullying. Just as students go through a wide range of experiences, some of these teachers have also experienced bullying situations which have been both frightening and painful. They said these experiences have helped to shape their character and how they deal with student bullying in their classrooms. Helen said, "I am sure my own personal experiences with bullying have shaped very much who I am." Often these teachers said they went out of their way to counsel students as best they could, and to try to identify where their aggression came from.

Teachers who have lived through the experience of being bullied said they shared a special bond with student victims. They said they were better able to relate to what those students were going through and were often more perceptive when it came to recognizing bullying behavior. They said their experience often helped them to ease the pain of student bullying as well as in the design of more effective strategies and interventions to deal with the bullying problem. Teachers said they could be instrumental in teaching bullying prevention classes because they understood the damage bullying could cause.

Interventions

This section of the study outlines teachers' experiences with interventions they considered to be either effective or ineffective when dealing with student bullying. Teachers' responses indicated they used a wide variety of strategies and interventions in their effort to deal with student bullying. Interventions discussed included simply observing student behavior and making the teacher's presence known during less structured times, to the ongoing development of a trusting relationship between teachers and students. Teachers also discussed the involvement of parents, administrators and other teachers, as well as punishments and character education.

Teacher Interventions, Beliefs, and Actions

Taking bullying seriously. According to the teachers in the study, bullying was a legitimate concern to school personnel, students, and community members. They reported bullying to be an issue which received much press attention, both in education and popular publications. I asked the teachers how serious they thought bullying was as an issue in their schools and if they felt that policies and responses were appropriate.

Because of recent episodes of school violence, as well as their own experiences, most of the teachers I interviewed felt that certain problems, which used to be considered trivial, must now be taken seriously. The teachers who felt that it was being dealt with appropriately in their schools expressed similar attitudes when contemplating this question. For example, Adam recalled several incidents at his school in which students were expelled for bullying and had to go to a neighboring county to attend school. The issue created quite a controversy in the local media. "I think bullying is a legitimate concern here. I don't think we minimize it and I don't think the community minimizes it." He said the research on episodes of school violence showed that the students who committed those acts felt they had a grievance against the school or students in the school. He said in a recent school shooting incident in California, the accused student said he and another student had lit a disposable lighter and let it burn for a few minutes until the metal on top had gotten hot, and then another boy held him and stuck it to his face. Linda said people often thought "that's a big city problem, that's not a problem here, we don't have that problem." She said bullying was a problem everywhere and pointed out the fact that Columbine was a fairly small school and in a fairly small community.

Teachers reflected on the recent history of school violence. They said that, since the Columbine shootings in 1999, several other violent incidents had taken place in our country which demonstrated the seriousness of bullying. They listed as an example the Virginia Tech shooting incident and said interventions could have been used to prevent the situation. They felt it was important to promote awareness of bullying and school violence in order to stop those types of disasters.

Most teachers said there could not be too much emphasis placed on bullying. They said they were concerned that if teachers did not address less serious incidents of bullying, they would turn into major problems later. Jessica said, "We could easily have a bomb or a gun, or whatever, brought into the school if there is not some type of regulation put on the harassment and on the comments." Teachers said sometimes officials did not do enough about the bullying problems the school experienced. Barbara told a story about a student who continuously bullied others to the point that he finally hurt another student bad enough to send him to the hospital. In a separate incident, the same student urinated on another child in the restroom. She said the only reason he was allowed to continue to go to school was because his parents were friends with someone at central office. She said parents were constantly worried about bullying and the safety of their kids, and that parents often had a very negative perception of the number of bullying incidents that took place in school.

Teachers reported that some parents were actually afraid to send their kids to her school. Ingrid had an experience which brought home to her how important it was to take threats seriously. She talked about an episode where a student threatened to bomb the school and more than 100 students stayed home. The student made a threat and other students began texting and e-mailing their friends to the point where the entire student body was upset. She said both students and parents took the threat seriously. The student who made the threat told teachers he was being teased in P.E. class, and he was "fed up with these kids making fun of me." He said that that was the first thing that came out of his mouth and that he simply wanted to retaliate. She said that the child was transferred to the alternative school for the remainder of the year.

On the other hand, a few teachers I interviewed felt that the bullying issue was overblown by the media, while not dealt with appropriately by the school. In her words, Barbara said, "I think it is blown out of proportion in the wrong way" and that parents think there was much more bullying than there really was. She said, "It's like on this one hand, we have the media scaring everybody to death, and then on the other hand, I feel like we don't do enough with the incidents we do have even though they are not major."

Similarly, Charles said parents often called the teacher and said, "My child is being bullied and that other child could bring a gun and shoot him." He said that sort of thought in most cases was far-fetched and that the media and the culture of our country often overemphasized the problem. Similarly, Frances said incidents of bullying in her school had decreased over the last 10 years. She recalled the story of a friend of hers who was homosexual. She said he told her that when he was in school, not only were the kids making fun of him, but also the P.E. teachers. She said, "In this day and age, the P.E. teachers don't make fun of the sissies in gym class." She said bullying was taken more seriously now than it once was.

Some teachers considered bullying to be a part of life. They said sometimes part of growing up was learning how to deal with problems like bullying, and that sometimes teachers intervened too early, before students had a chance to work out their problems on their own. Elaine said,

I think about myself growing up, and I dealt with bullies, and I chose to either confront and deal with it or ignore and move on. You learn a lot as an individual when you take care of your own problems.

Because of the fact that they can be held liable for not taking appropriate action to stop bullying, teachers said they were likely to intervene in student bullying issues.

Two teachers were not sure whether there was an overemphasis on bullying in schools. Kenneth said sometimes bullying was overemphasized and that sometimes calling too much attention to it resulted in a self-fulfilling prophecy wherein bullying actually increased due to the amount of concern over it. On the other hand, he said that if teachers took no preventative actions and an incident occurred, the teacher would be at fault. Helen also commented on the idea of a self-fulfilling prophecy. She said often teachers talked about bullying to the point that it actually happened. She also said she would be afraid to ignore the problem because it really was a serious issue.

Do I ignore it and hope it is going to go away, or do I show my students my classroom is a safe place for them to come to and that if they need to stay back and talk, they can?

Teachers said it was impossible not to deal with bullying because it was so prevalent in schools. They said cyberbullying, texting, the internet, and Web sites such as "Facebook" all represent a new set of bullying problems for students to face. Some teachers said they were bullied as children and bullying was always going to be part of the school and the culture. Helen said it was "part of the pecking order when you are growing up. That doesn't make it right, but ignoring it is not going to help it go away either."

Teachers had various views as to whether bullying was a problem which was overemphasized in schools. All of them, however, agreed that bullying was an issue students faced in schools and that ignoring it would do nothing to solve the problem. Although it was important not to overreact and to consider every negative interaction

between students as bullying, they agreed that it remained a serious problem for rural middle schools.

Recognizing bullying. According to teachers, the ability to recognize true bullying as opposed to a "playing" situation was crucial when dealing with the bullying problem. Teachers said their personal experiences, the professional development they have had, and their ability to "know their students" allowed them to be able to tell the difference. They said the inability to distinguish the difference could result in escalating behaviors which were dangerous to students and teachers alike. They reported that although bullies and victims varied in size and type, it was important to be able to recognize bully-type behavior. Close observation and supervision, along with "knowing" their students were crucial in the effort to stop bullying.

When recognizing bullying, teachers said the key was to know their students. The effect of team teaching builds a sense of community and team work to identify and address bullying. They also said their experience allowed them to be able to tell the difference between bullying behavior and less serious issues. Often they said they could tell what was happening by the friends students were with and whether they were confident with one another. Teachers said they were alerted when they saw kids with someone with whom they never associate, especially if emotions were involved. They said many problems were misread in that they sometimes considered incidents to be a "boys will be boys" issue. Even the most experienced teachers said they sometimes had difficulty in identifying bullying.

Teachers said they must be more stringent in their observations, and that being able to recognize bullying type behavior might prevent situations from escalating. Grace

said, "I think knowing the kids helps some in determining whether or not it is bullying or playing." At the middle-school age, she said students loved to horse-play and that it could easily get out of hand. Most teachers said they tried to keep that kind of behavior to a minimum in their classrooms, and that they must constantly remind students of what was appropriate and that students must treat each other with respect.

Teachers who were interviewed said one of the most effective intervention strategies was the close observation of students. They found that they must constantly be watching students and looking for bullying-type behaviors; especially during class changes or other less structured times. According to the teachers in the study, observation could be very difficult due to the number of students for which they were responsible, as well as the numerous daily duties which interfered with their ability to closely watch each student in every situation. They said that despite their best efforts they often missed bullying, which was frightening to them. Some teachers mentioned that their schools had cameras for increased supervision, but they stressed the fact that it was the watchful eye of a caring teacher who knew his or her students and what to look for in order to keep them safe.

Teachers said the pressures of testing, scores, and budget made it difficult to monitor students as much as they would like. Ingrid said she had to be "vigilant" all the time, and Jessica added, "Bullying is always in the back of my mind." She also stressed the need for teachers to work harder at observing the difference between play and actual bullying. Because of her personal experiences with bullying, she said she might be more aware of student bullying than some other teachers who might not have had those experiences. She said, "When students are playing and one has an angry face, tears, or

tenseness in their shoulders, it is probably not just playing." Teachers said they could

often determine which students were acting as bullies simply by watching their habits and

mannerisms. They said they did not approve of name calling even if students were only

joking with one another. They voiced the concern that this type of behavior often led to

other, more serious problems including bullying. They recognized the fact that although

bullying sometimes happened right in front of teachers, teachers still might not see it.

They said in order to be responsive to students' needs, they must watch and listen

constantly to everything that happened.

According to the teachers who were interviewed, one of the most crucial times to

observe students was during class change. They said for the most part they were right

outside their classroom door watching and listening to what the students did and said.

Sometimes, however, teachers said they found themselves helping a student in the

classroom, making it difficult to get into the hallways during class change. They said that

kind of situation demonstrated why team teaching was so valuable. If a teacher was

unable to be at the door for whatever reason, one of the colleagues was there to help

monitor student behavior. Most of the schools represented in the study had school

policies in place which required teachers to closely monitor students and their behavior.

Linda said in her school, teachers were to be in the halls monitoring students during class

changes. She said teachers stood in their doorways so that they could monitor both the

classrooms and the hallways at the same time. She agreed with the policy and said she

thought it helped to prevent some of the bullying that might otherwise take place in her

school.

Teachers in the study stressed the importance of watching students throughout the day and said that through this observation they were able to notice changes in behavior, which could be the result of bullying or exclusion. According to the teachers, it was necessary to conduct what one teacher described as "frequent checks" and to get involved enough to find out how students were doing from class to class. He said this kind of monitoring helped him ascertain how things were going in his students' lives, and whether they were experiencing difficulties which related to bullying. Likewise, David said it was important for teachers to communicate with one another when it came to student behavior, and to be aware of how their students were progressing by watching them throughout the day. Ingrid said she thought teachers needed to be more vigilant when it came to watching their students. "When you see a child that is smiling all time and then all of a sudden comes in with a very blank look, you know something isn't right." She said teachers needed to talk to students when they observed changes taking place in their lives. She said it was important for students to feel as though their teachers were concerned about them. Grace said when she saw a student being left out of the group, she often encouraged other students to include that student and to make him or her feel more welcome. She said this type of inclusion was often very successful. She also said she would like to see the development of a student hall monitor program to help supervise students throughout the day.

When they see bullying type behavior, teachers said they immediately acted to stop it. They said students often reacted by saying they were "just kidding" with their victims, and that sometimes it was difficult for the bullies to distinguish the difference

between a simple prank and behavior that was actually bullying or even sexual harassment.

Teachers said most bullying problems developed with students who demonstrate both academic and social difficulties. When dealing with these students, teachers said they had to monitor their behaviors closely, even to the point of letting them go to the restroom one at a time. According to teachers, the development of social skills was crucial because those students who had not learned how to handle themselves socially were often singled out as targets for bullying. They said students who had learned good social skills almost never experienced bullying. Linda said, "Sometimes students who are low functioning academically are picked on but I think it's more related to personality." She said students with academic problems often had trouble dealing with the effects of bullying such as the ability to develop coping skills or to deal with adversity in general.

Teachers said they were able to observe many different kinds of bullying. Helen said she observed a lot of overt, physical type bullying. She told the story of a male student in her class who kicked another student in the back as he was walking down the hall. She said when she took the bully aside she asked him why he kicked the other boy. The boy replied, "Well, he reminds me of my dad, and I just don't like him. He reminds me of my dad." She said she continued to talk to the student and eventually found he had a deep psychological issue with his father.

Teachers reported that emotional and psychological types of bullying, although sometimes harder to identify, were just as prevalent in rural middle schools. One example listed by Helen was the fact that students often talked very negatively to one another. She said,

I liken it to going back to the whole Bart Simpson mentality, just that snide

sarcasm, and you hear it pretty prevalent on television nowadays, on sitcoms,

putting other people down, belittling other people, sarcasm. It is just supposedly

all in good fun and joking and teasing, but it's painful. It's very painful.

She said sometimes bullying could even be nonverbal as in just the rolling of the eyes, a

heavy sigh, or anything meant to demean or make fun of another student.

Some teachers said they had noticed an increase in the number of student bullying

incidents and they attributed this to the fact that their classes were larger than they once

were. They said several incidents had stemmed from students who were experiencing

some bad issues at home and it seemed they would bring them to school and take out

their anger and frustrations on the other students.

According to teachers, bullies were often larger in size than their victims. They

said it was difficult to place a stereotype on bullies, however, because they could appear

to be the most timid, meek person, but when they were in their circle of friends, they

could become very cruel. They said these students often had challenging home lives, that

they usually did not live with both parents, or that they might have some kind of situation

where they did not like their home life for some reason. Teachers reported that often

bullies were students who had not had a lot of success academically. Elaine said, "They

see someone else they can pick on and let out some of those frustrations." She said

bullies wanted to fit in with everyone else, they often had a temper, and they easily

became angry.

Teachers reported that it was difficult to identify a typical bully victim. Barbara

said, "I don't know that there is a typical bully victim because part of it is middle school

is such a tender age." She said sometimes kids felt like they were being picked on for trivial reasons and they were really just being very sensitive. Other teachers said the amount of bullying had stayed relatively the same in their schools. They said they were concerned about the student attitudes, however, and that students seemed to care less about school and about what they do. Some teachers attributed part of the problem to inconsistency on the part of the school administration. Frequent changes in administration could contribute to an unstable situation, the teachers believed.

Teachers said bullying took place across all levels and with all different kinds of kids. Not only did the list of victims include "geeky" types of kids, but teachers said it also included cheerleaders, boys who play sports, and kids who are nice-looking and popular. Helen said, "A victim could be anybody. I find myself just having to be very watchful, very observant." Teachers said they listened for the things students said to one another and how they acted toward others in the hallways. Despite constant observations, teachers said they were concerned that something would go unnoticed, especially in the larger schools.

Administrative support and school policies. In most cases, teachers said they felt supported by administrators when it came to bullying. Because of increased attention to bullying, they said administrators were more aggressive in dealing with bullying problems. Support from administration was important when dealing with bullying and teachers said they wanted assurance that incidents would be dealt with in a tough manner. One teacher reported that in her school, support from administration was inconsistent and that students who bullied others were not always dealt with in the same manner.

Without a strong administration, teachers said they found themselves "putting out fires" in the classroom rather than teaching the curriculum. Helen said, "If you don't have that support, you don't any power to your punch, so to speak." If a teacher told a student some sort of disciplinary action was going to take place as a result of their actions, and the administration failed to implement that action, the kids would think the teacher was "making empty threats." Teachers said it was crucial for administrators to be tough when it came to discipline and bullying. When teachers wrote-up students for bullying, they said the matter was then turned over to the administration. At that point, teachers said the administration investigated the bullying incidents and determined punishment, if any. They said administrators decided on the severity of the situation and whether a student would receive some sort of suspension.

Most teachers in the study said school administration tried to support them. They said bullying had become a serious issue in the minds of teachers, parents, and administrators and that principals and assistant principals were trying to focus on stopping bullying type behaviors. Jessica said she was skeptical, however, since bullying had been going on basically since the beginning of time; she did not know if it were possible to completely eliminate bullying. She remarked, "Yeah, we have had public outcry before about bullying, within this county, and I think the administration tries to deal with that more so than the teachers." She said teachers had a busy schedule just trying to educate students, and often it just was not possible to give student bullying the time and attention it deserved. Teachers said administrators were likely to be more aggressive in their dealing with bullying if parents and the public demanded action be

taken, and that their school administration did a good job with dealing with bullying situations overall.

One teacher said there was some inconsistency when it came to being supported by the administration. Barbara said there had been times when she turned in student referrals for the school's Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) program and not only was nothing done for the student, but also she felt as though she had been scolded for turning them in. At other times, she said incidents were handled, especially if they were more serious in nature. She recalled an incident with one student who was well known throughout the school as a bully. She said she and the other teachers did everything according to the discipline process and no action was ever taken by the administration due to the fact that the student's parents knew someone in central office. In that particular incident, the school's administration was attempting to address his behavior and was stopped from completing the process by central office administration.

When dealing with bullying in schools, the teachers who were interviewed said school administration should serve as a support and an intervention. Teachers said it was the responsibility of the administration to act as a support system for teachers who were generally the first ones to notice bullying. Teachers were often so close to bullying situations both physically and emotionally, that a neutral party was needed to insure fairness to all students. They said it was the responsibility of the administration to enforce policy and procedures and to serve as the final authority when deciding consequences.

Teachers said when bullying issues reached a certain point of seriousness it was necessary to turn the matter directly over to the administration. Ingrid said that she could get very angry or upset with students about bullying and that she did not like to get into a

situation where she could overreact. Most teachers said they turned blatant bullying situations over to administrators immediately, and that they often called the parents of the students involved. They said they often handled less severe incidents in the classroom, and they relied on the principal or assistant principal to take appropriate action.

Teachers said sometimes they became frustrated with administration, disagreeing with the way they handled bullying situations. Linda recalled a specific incident in which one student was physically bullied by a group of students in a classroom for 10 or 15 minutes because the teacher was distracted by a group of students who had crowded around his desk. She said that, when the matter was turned over to the principal, there were really no consequences for the actions. The student was devastated and because of her learning disability, really could not comprehend why the incident had happened to her and why people would be so mean.

Teachers who were interviewed reported that their middle schools had specific discipline policies in place which were meant to address student bullying. According to them, most schools had a "zero tolerance" policy when it came to bullying. They said the consequences of bully-type behavior were often punishment ranging from a verbal warning to the use of in-school or out-of-school suspension. Most of the teachers in this study said they did not see suspensions as particularly effective in dealing with student bullying. One teacher said students who were suspended may even use their time away from school to plot against others and to continue their bullying behavior. Teachers said talking to students about their actions and helping them to change their behavior was a better way to deal with student bullying.

Teachers said that, in most of their schools, they were required to document bullying incidents, which were then dealt with by administrators. They said administrators encouraged them to make parent phone calls and to conduct student-teacher meetings. They said it was important to involve administration, which could often view student behavior from a much broader perspective since the teacher only saw the student one period per day. Helen said she talked extensively to students about making her classroom a safe environment and students knew she would not tolerate bullying. She said suspension, whether it was "ISS" or "OSS," was often ineffective when dealing with bullying. Some students told her that they actually enjoyed ISS and OSS and that they viewed suspension as a day off from school.

According to the teachers in the study, it was often very difficult to determine the difference between bullying and simple horseplay. Most teachers said each incident was viewed differently, and depending upon the severity of the incident, some teachers said they would collaborate with parents in order to decide punishment. If for example, the bully seemed remorseful and appeared to understand that what he or she had done was wrong, the punishment might not be as severe. However, when severe incidents took place, teachers said bullies should receive the maximum punishment for their actions. Charles said his school discipline policy listed bullying as a level three offense, which was the same as fighting or gross disrespect to a teacher. If a child was guilty of bullying, he or she would receive three days of in-school suspension for the first offense. The second offense would be three days of out-of-school suspension. Similarly, David said for the first bullying offense, depending upon the situation, a student would receive a verbal warning. He said the next step was to notify the parents and there might be

punishment at this stage depending upon the severity of the act. He said the main goal was to take care of the situation as quickly as possible.

Teachers reported that if they saw bullying taking place, they wrote a referral to guidance or administration. If the problem was on-going, the punishment might be suspension from school. Many of the teachers said their schools tried to deal with bullying situations through counseling and mediation first, but that more severe consequences might be necessary at times. Elaine said, "We have an anti-bullying policy: Bullying will not be tolerated."

Frances recalled an incident involving several Hispanic students who were being picked on by White students. She said there was no mediation or any other alternatives, that the entire group simply got suspended from school. In reference to student suspensions, Jessica said: "Hopefully that would teach them not to do that sort of thing again." She said in most cases suspension is not effective. If students actually sat and thought about their actions, she said it would be more effective.

Some of the teachers said they did not see their school's policies as necessarily effective because students were often simply isolated and their problems never really were addressed. They said under many of their school's bullying policies, students were simply placed in an in-school or out-of-school suspension, and no one addressed the core of their problems. Marie said that although she worked hard to implement her school's discipline policy, most of her success in dealing with student bullying was a result of talking to her students in an effort to get them to change their bully-type behavior. She said both bullies and their victims often came to her if they felt bullying had taken place.

Trusting Relationship

The teachers who were interviewed in this study mentioned the development of a trusting relationship between teachers and students as one of the most effective interventions when dealing with bullying. Of all interventions mentioned, they cited the development of a trusting relationship more frequently than any other intervention. Time and again, teachers said one of the most important things they could do was to develop a relationship of trust between them and their students. They said it was important for students to see them not only as teachers, but also as a trusting adult who had the power to help them through difficult situations. They said it was important for teachers to understand that they must develop and nurture an atmosphere of mutual respect in their classrooms if they truly wanted to help students deal with bullying.

Teachers mentioned in their interviews that classrooms should function as a small community in which there were guidelines, rules, and boundaries. They stressed the development of an environment in which there was mutual respect and trust between teacher and students. Frances said she tried to create such a community in her classroom from the very beginning, and that she wanted her students to work together and to get to know each other on a personal basis. She said doing this often helped her to avoid potential problems. Other teachers said they and their students conducted class meetings in which they named officers for identifying responsibilities. They reported that their students enjoyed the process of participation in this sort of community. They said that if problems arose which involved bullying or other troubling issues, the class took time out of their schedule to stop and discuss the situation. Some teachers assigned students to random groups in their classrooms and did not allow them to pick and choose their

partners. In this small group setting, teachers said students did not always know each other, which helped them to make new friends and to avoid bullying-type situations. Teachers also mentioned mentoring as a good practice for developing relationships. Frances said teachers and staff members in her school volunteered to adopt students and to mentor them. She said this helped students to feel as though they had someone they could talk to in time of need.

Teachers acknowledged the fact that community building at the middle-school level could be very difficult. Marie said, "You have to develop those relationships between the kids so they have mutual trust, and they feel like they are loved and they belong." Teachers said it was very important to get to know the students in order to truly help them, and that teachers could be more successful in stopping bullying if they would work more toward building communities in their classrooms. They said it was important to develop an appreciation and an understanding between teachers and students. One intervention program, which Marie reported as being very successful, was called "Rethinking Your Actions." She said the program was based upon lessons and one-on-one interaction between teacher and student and focused on helping students find alternative ways to deal with other students.

Some teachers reported that their students knew that they could trust them, and that if they came to them, they would try to help. Grace said she had a good relationship with her students and that she thinks of herself as a favorite aunt, although she maintained guidelines and structure in her class. Many of the teachers mentioned that they tried to get their students involved with "service projects" which allowed them to help others. They said they tried to instill in their students the fact that they were part of the community and

that they should help others. Adam recalled a situation involving several female students who bullied each other and other students throughout the school year. Over time, he said the students began to trust him, and that trust enabled him to get through to the students and to deter some of the bullying type behavior they were exhibiting. He said the girls stopped a lot of their behaviors because they feared they would disappoint him. He said,

> In almost every case of school shootings in the last 25 years, there were students who knew it was going to happen before it happened. It is a sad commentary in and of itself that they did not have enough confidence in anybody that was at those schools that they felt like they could tell about it.

Many of the teachers who were interviewed said schools should focus more of their efforts on programs which helped to develop trust between teachers and students. They said it was important for students to see a teacher's classroom as a safe place, and that the development of trusting relationships helped to deter some bullying in their schools. Kenneth said students could come to him with their bullying problems and that he tried to make it clear that they could. He said if students were unwilling to trust in him, however, it limited what he could do to help them.

Throughout the interview process, teachers talked about the importance of putting students first and paying particular close attention to their needs and feelings. Barbara said she "loves her kids and she tells them they are the smartest, prettiest kids in the school." She said she learned from several mentor teachers how to treat kids with respect and that if she believed her students were wonderful, they would rise to her beliefs. She said she had a good relationship with her students and that often she was the one they came to with their problems. Likewise, Charles said that he cared for students as

individuals first and that he did not think they would be as open to learning if they did not think teachers cared for them. He said it was important to create a "nurturing and positive relationship" with all of his students, and he tried to make students aware of the fact that they could talk with him about problems or ask questions about other troubling issues. Adam suggested that teachers should work to let students know they could trust them, and that they should avoid an "us versus them" mentality at all costs. Elaine said that she thought that most students would be honest with her if she asked them questions about bullying situations.

Many of the teachers said one of the most important things they could do as teachers was to build an open rapport with students. They said students often needed to know that someone was there for them to talk to in case they needed help or protection. According to the teachers interviewed, there were times when parents called to complain about their child being bullied at school when the teachers themselves were unaware that the bullying was taking place. They said this kind of situation was why it was very important for students to tell their teachers if they were having problems with bullying. They said the development of a trusting relationship made it easier to keep teachers informed and students safe. According to the teachers, students' needs were often immediate, and they sometimes needed to talk to someone quickly or else a situation would possibly escalate into a more serious problem. They said sometimes students would write teachers a note to let them know about an issue that was bothering them, or they might ask to stay after class and to talk about their problems. Most teachers said they were pretty good at determining whether a student was being troubled by an issue.

According to the teachers, simply talking to students about bullying or about what was going on in their lives could be an effective intervention for dealing with bullying. Teachers said talking to students allowed them to be aware of the problems their students faced, including being bullied. They said as teachers they must be able to talk openly and honestly with students about bullying. They acknowledged the fact that not every student would be receptive to these conversations but felt that the majority of their students would be. Whether these conversations took place in a one-on-one situation with a student who had been bullied, or with an entire class through group discussion, teachers stressed the importance of talking to students about bullying and listening to what the students had to say.

Teachers said sometimes adults did not give students enough opportunities to talk about bullying. Kenneth stressed the importance of talking to both bullies and to victims. He said students often had strong opinions about bullying and those opinions often helped him to better understand what they were going through.

Other teachers who were interviewed had similar views regarding the importance of student discussion when it came to bullying. Barbara recalled an incident which involved a student who was targeting another student in her class. She told him the comments he was making to the other student were not helpful, and a week later, he apologized. The student said he did not realize that he was upsetting the other student. In a related example, Adam recalled an incident involving two female students who had cheated on their homework. In addressing the situation, he said he told the girl he was very disappointed in her and considered it a sign of disrespect toward him by not turning in the assignment. After talking to him, the student turned in the assignment.

Teachers agreed that sometimes simply addressing the issue and allowing students to talk about it made a lot of difference. Linda said her students often came to her about bullying situations. She said when addressing the situation, she talked to students on a personal basis, not as an authority figure only. Likewise, Grace said she often talked to her students about bullying and involved them in discussions about the problem. She said after students discussed bullying as a group and talked about the fact that bullying was not always physical, they began to realize that they might in fact have a bullying problem in their school.

Teachers in rural middle schools think it is important to be able to talk to their students about the problems they face in their daily lives. They said discussion allowed students to see a different viewpoint than their own, and that a patient and caring teacher could often help students to understand the consequences of their behaviors. Through discussion, teachers said students who bullied others often began to realize how their actions could cause immeasurable harm to their victims. They acknowledged the fact that students often had insight into the causes and implications of bullying, adding that teachers should take the time to discuss with students how bullying started and how it could be stopped in rural middle schools.

Teachers said it was important for students to think they could trust someone who was in a position of authority when it came to emotional issues. Jessica recalled an incident involving a female student who was picking on a male student. She said the male student would just sit in her class and cry. She said she did not know what was bothering him until she finally pulled him away from the other students and asked him to tell her what was going on. The student told her he was tired of being picked on. She said

although the student did not want to talk to the counselor, he agreed to let her talk to the counselor on his behalf. She said if she and the student had not had such a good rapport, he would have never let her help him, and he would still be being bullied.

Teachers pointed out the fact that bullies often controlled their victims because students were afraid to tell their teachers. They said that, when a student bullied, it was often because they wanted to control someone else. Jessica said, "I think if students feel comfortable enough with a teacher to talk to them about issues they are going through, that will resolve the need to control something else."

The teachers who were interviewed said students often had the perception that teachers could not do anything about the bullying, so they did not come to them for help. They also said students avoided reporting bullying problems because they did not want to be labeled as a "tattle tale," and that if they went to teachers it would only lead to more bullying. They believed that, at the middle-school age it was very important for students not to have the reputation of what Kenneth called "ratting out." He said he served as an advocate for his students and that in some sense he acted as a "bigger bully." He said he did not allow students to bully one another and that his students saw him as a protector. He said they knew that if they bullied another person they would have to deal with him and that often served as a deterrent in his classroom.

Some teachers said many of their colleagues genuinely cared about their students but they did not always handle things in a subtle way when it came to students and their personal problems. Linda recalled an example in which a student told the teacher another student was bothering him and it really hurt his feelings. The teacher's reaction was to yell across the room and say, "I need to see you right now so and so!" Teachers agreed

that even if their intentions were good, it was very important that bullying situations be handled in a skillful way.

While they acknowledged the fact that some barriers to forming a trusting relationship existed, most teachers said their students knew them well enough that if something was going on they could tell their teacher about it. They said the development of a trusting relationship between teacher and student provided students with the necessary confidence and support to cope with bullying. David said, "Trust is extremely important and if students do not feel like they have an avenue for taking care of a bullying type situation, it may escalate into a feeling of helplessness for the student, which might be hard to overcome." According to Helen, "Trust is everything." Teachers agreed that it was critical for students to have an outlet, and someone they could talk to when they needed help with bullying.

Consultation with Counseling Services

Teachers who were interviewed in this study felt that the involvement of the school counselor was an effective intervention when dealing with student bullying. They said counselors used strategies such as therapy, mediation, or friendship groups to talk to students about bullying. Some of the teachers said their schools offered sign-up times in which students could make an appointment to talk to the counselor about issues that were troubling to them. One teacher said her students asked for counseling sessions with adults after listening to a guest speaker who was an expert and former victim of bullying. Teachers said they also used a form of counseling in their classrooms by leading whole-class discussions or group activities which centered on bullying.

According to the teachers interviewed, it was important for schools to have a strong school counselor when dealing with bullying issues. They complained that too often counselors were used as schedule makers or had to perform other duties unrelated to counseling. They said these other duties limited the counselor's ability to effectively deal with students on a full-time basis. Linda said in her school, the counselor was in a tough situation because she was shared between two schools. This meant she worked with nearly 600 students. Fortunately, she said, her time was devoted to counseling only and she did not have additional duties. Barbara said she saw more and more pressure being placed on schools to meet the needs of students. She listed as an example the fact that schools had nurses to meet medical needs, and social workers to meet food and clothing needs. She said it was also important to have someone who could help with students' mental health needs while they were at school.

Teachers said when it came to dealing with student bullying, it helped to know what to say to the victims and that the school counselor could be very helpful in this regard. They felt that, as teachers, they tried to encourage students and to let them know it was okay to tell someone when something was going on or when someone was bothering them. They stressed the importance of having the school counselor conduct anti-bullying classes in each classroom**.** Elaine said, "I think we need to call attention, make students pay attention and be willing to say, 'Joey's getting picked on here, what can we do about it?'" She said when students felt empowered they were more likely to call attention to things, or to make teachers aware of things, before they got to the point of a fight or an office referral.

Teachers reported that, when they saw bullying take place, they often tried to talk to the victims in order to determine what had happened and what had led to the incident. Often they said they involved the counselor who would use mediation techniques to help the situation. Elaine said that sometimes just talking with the students and making them aware that she knew about the incident was enough to deter future problems. Teachers agreed that the counselor could be pivotal because sometimes students did not want to talk to their teachers about those kinds of issues.

Teachers who were interviewed said they worked in coordination with the school counselor to address students' needs when it came to bullying. Teachers reported that the role of the counselor was crucial when dealing with students and their emotional issues. They praised their counselors as always being ready to help when students need them.

Grace said her counselor had a very open-door policy with students. She said the counselor had a system in which each teacher had cards in their room that students used to sign up for appointments. "If it is an emergency, however, we can send them to her immediately." Several of the teachers interviewed said that because of the tremendous emotional and psychological needs students experienced, teachers and staff members in their schools had become more involved with counseling students. Although most teachers said bullying did not take place in the regular classroom very often, when it did, they involved the counselor as much as possible.

Teachers reported that they used counseling as a way to help not only victims, but also bullies. When dealing with student bullies, they said that it helped to give students an idea of how their actions made others feel. Elaine remarked, "They may know and they don't care and that happens sometimes. But, I think, sometimes they don't realize that

what they are saying is actually really hurtful." She said it helped to talk to them and to help them see what things were like from another person's point of view. Teachers felt that the counselor could be instrumental in helping to address bullying concerns by working with the bullies themselves. They reported that, if they saw a bullying issue beginning to take place, they often involved the school counselor as a first step toward resolution before referring students to the administration.

Unfortunately, teachers who were interviewed conceded the fact that not all bullies or victims could be helped through counseling. Teachers reported that their school counselors often used specific techniques to talk to students about bullying. They said very often these techniques were successful, but if students refused to participate or even go to the therapy, there was nothing the counselor could do. Ingrid recalled a situation in which three female students were picking on another female student and the situation appeared to be resolved until they found letters written by the girls stating they were going to hurt the other girl and kill the teacher.

Teachers said the practice of counseling was crucial when dealing with bullying in rural middle schools. They said their schools had full-time counselors who served an important role in meeting the mental and emotional needs of students. They suggested that their counselors were limited, however, because they alone could not possibly meet the needs of all the students in a school, all the time. Teachers said they must also develop counseling skills which could be used to help students deal with bullying and other personal issues in schools. Although not every student would listen, teachers said it was important to talk to them and to let them know they were there for them if they needed them.

Small-Group and Classroom Interventions

Many of the teachers who were interviewed advocated using a stronger approach to stopping bullies from victimizing other students. Teachers cautioned, however, against getting too emotionally involved or to aggressive when attempting to stop student bullying. Kenneth said not every teacher could use what he called a "heavy-handed approach" to bullying. He said it took a certain kind of teacher, personality and background in order to deal harshly with students and essentially "be the bigger bully." Teachers agreed that they would not recommend dealing with all situations in that manner because it could cause trouble for the teacher if it was perceived that the teacher was being too harsh. Kenneth said new and inexperienced teachers must be particularly careful when dealing with bullying in this way, but that dealing with bullies in a harsh manner could be a "pretty expedient method to stop bullying."

This type of approach has proven successful for many other teachers including Charles who said he asked students to "put themselves in someone else's shoes," and Adam who said he attempted to show others that they too could easily become victims of bullying. He added that, as a coach, he tried to help his students understand that they should set an example for other students to follow. He said he reminded bullies that there were things he could make fun of with them if he chose to do so, but that he did not because "there was no honor in that and that wasn't the way you treat other people."

Many of the teachers who were interviewed said they tried to incorporate fun activities which helped teach students about bullying. One teacher talked about one such activity, in which she demonstrated different types of bullying, and then led students in a discussion about the potential dangers of bullying. During the discussion, she told her

students that people have been killed just because of the way they looked and because they were different. She said her students agreed there was a problem with bullying in their school and that students should not be bullied because they looked different or because they liked to read or because they wore their hair in a different way. The students agreed that it was not acceptable to call each other names and that they should not be made to feel uncomfortable just because they were different.

Teachers said sometimes simply talking to the bullies could make a difference in how they acted toward others. Linda said sometimes students did not perceive what they were doing as bullying and they genuinely felt they were just "playing around." Teachers agreed that it was helpful for teachers to clarify what was and what was not bullying. They said talking with the victims often helped teach students not to react to bullying-type behavior because it was the reaction from the victims that the bully was looking for. Teachers reported that on occasion students had suggested having small group counseling sessions with members of the faculty and staff in order to deal with bullying issues. They said that if students were willing to talk, they would most likely participate in discussion.

Teachers who were interviewed stressed the importance of helping students understand social skills. Teachers reported that a large number of bullying incidents they observed had to do with excluding others. They said that they encouraged students to pick out other students who were by themselves and to include them in their groups. Grace said she would sometimes whisper in another student's ear, "Hey, do you mind asking so and so to sit by you?" She said very often students were happy to do so. She also said she had seen other teachers who had "Mix it up days" in which they discussed emotional tolerance and anti-bullying.

Many teachers said they constructed student groups which included bullies, victims, and other students to help students realize they had more in common with each other than they thought. They said that, although they had to monitor the groups carefully, this approach was very often successful. Teacher said sometimes students needed to be reminded of what behaviors were appropriate, and if they heard students make bully-type remarks; they reminded them that they were "verging on bullying." They said students would often say they were "just playing around" and they had not meant any harm. If the problem occurred with the same student more than once, however, teachers reported that they reminded students that, if the behaviors continued, they would be forced to write them up for bullying.

Some teachers cautioned against bringing all parties together and said they preferred to address bullies and victims at separate times and away from each other. Grace said sometimes it helped just to gets kids away from each other and let them cool down. Jessica said she reminded victims that the students who were bullying them were trying to control them. In responding to the bullies, she said she tried to remind them of how their words and actions made other students feel. Teachers agreed that schools needed to do more counseling when they were dealing with both bullies and victims. They believed that if students understood that what they were doing was wrong, they were more likely to stop problem behavior.

Teachers observed that often students did not realize the implications of the things they said to one another. Charles told his students that they must be careful of what they say and that it was inappropriate to make remarks like "I'll kill you" or "I'll beat you up." He reminded students that those were threats and that that behavior was considered

bullying. Teachers agreed that one of the most beneficial things they could do was to talk

to their students about bullying and appropriate behavior. Charles said students often had

insights that adults overlook. Marie stated that she tried to help students meet the needs

they may be lacking, as opposed to what schools normally did, which was to help

students cope with bullies. She said we should not try to bribe them or coerce them, but

we should try to recognize why they did the things they did and why they reacted the way

they did. She said this was the only way we could get them to change their behaviors.

Character Education

Many of the teachers report finding that their middle schools were promoting

character education as an effective intervention for bullying. Teachers said character

education was important and that schools needed to help students develop a sense of

pride in their school in the hopes that it would deter them from bullying one another.

Teachers also stressed the importance of training to help integrate character education

throughout the curriculum. They mentioned one such program called PBS (Positive

Behavioral Support), which they said had been introduced in many of their schools as an

effective means with which to help students understand how to deal with one another in a

positive way, and to reward them for their positive efforts.

Teachers said character education was extremely important when dealing with

bullying issues, and schools should focus their efforts on character education from the

earliest opportunity. Linda said character education helped give students the sense that

they were part of a team, which helped them to deal with one another in a more positive

way. Teachers stressed the importance of having quality professional development on

how to effectively integrate character education into the curriculum and across all subjects.

Many of the teachers who were interviewed said their schools used the Positive Behavioral Support program or PBS. The teachers who used the program said it worked well in addressing bullying problems at the middle-school level by rewarding positive behavior as opposed to punishing negative behavior. Teachers said that, before implementation of the program, they were asked to identify bullying, including picking on others and verbal harassment as areas the PBS program should target. In most cases, teachers chose hallways, restrooms, and the cafeteria as the areas in which most bullying occurred. Teachers said that, as part of the program, each morning administrators made announcements about the negatives of bullying. They said students also got involved by doing things like making commercials about behaving positively, or making posters and flyers to post around the school. Charles said in his school the counseling department provided Character Ed sheets for homerooms once a month which focused on making students more aware of identifying and stopping bullying behavior. He said at the end of the year, school discipline data showed office referrals in regard to bullying had decreased. Similarly, Marie said her school also used Positive Behavioral Support and focused on universal behavioral expectations implemented throughout the school. She said the program was strict and rigid but had a lot of support across the school environment.

Teachers said one of the major problems they had seen in education was the lack of male role models in many middle schools. Elaine said sometimes boys who were having trouble with issues like bullying did not want anyone to know about it, and it

would be helpful to have more male teachers in schools so that boys could have the option of discussing their problems with members of the same gender.

Involving Others

 Parental involvement. According to teachers who were interviewed, one intervention which was widely used and has proven to be effective was the involvement of parents in order to stop bullying behaviors. Teachers said clear communication between teacher and parent could be crucial when dealing with issues of student bullying. They acknowledged that not all parents were helpful, however, and some simply did not know how to handle their own children. Parents, however, could be very helpful and a strong teacher-parent relationship could help when dealing with bullying. According to teachers, parents were more likely to help if they thought their child was the victim. If their child was the bully, however, teachers said parents were often not as likely to help.

 Teachers emphasized the need for a strong working relationship with parents and said this type of relationship increased their chances of being successful in dealing with bullying. Adam recalled several instances where all he had had to do was threaten to have the parents come in to the school and the issues resolved themselves. He added that when students realized there was no link between teacher and parents, he was not likely to be as successful in dealing with bullying.

 According to the teachers in the study, often parents were not aware of what was going on with their child in school when it came to bullying. They agreed that when teachers took the time to let them know it made them very appreciative. David noted, "My philosophy is a telephone call pays high dividends." He said the community in which the school was based was extremely supportive of the school and the teachers.

Teachers agreed that it was a great asset to have parents who were willing to volunteer and help out when needed.

Teachers stressed the importance of getting parents involved so that they could be working at home on the same problems the teachers were working on at school. Many of the teachers said they went as far as to set up both daily and weekly communication to make sure the parents knew what was happening with their children at school. Elaine said she felt it was important to communicate with the parents of not only the bullies, but also the victims themselves, even though sometimes the victims were too embarrassed to discuss the situation.

Teachers agreed that involving parents was really the only effective way of dealing with student bullying, and if teachers and parents worked together in a supportive relationship, the school's efforts were much more successful. Many of the teachers said the threat of a phone call to parents was very effective when trying to stop problem behavior. Helen said this type of strategy was especially effective when dealing with Hispanic students because they represented a matriarchal society in which the women had the final say in most matters. Students did not want to get into trouble with their mother or grandmother, so they stopped whatever behavior was causing trouble.

Some teachers said involving parents in bullying issues could be very "touchy." In referring to student victims Linda said, "Sometimes they will hide it from their parents, sometimes they will beg you please don't tell my parents or please don't tell the principal." Teachers agreed that often students would rather the incident be handled discreetly because they did not want to run the risk of causing the bullying situation to

escalate. Many teachers noted that, when it comes to bullying, they often left communication with the parents up to the administration.

Teachers reported that many parents appreciated the efforts of teachers and asked them for help. Linda said she had a parent ask her, "So and so texted my child and I feel like it was inappropriate and can you handle it?" Similarly, Barbara said parents often came to her to discuss their concerns about bullying, although she had never really made it a point to seek out parental involvement on a specific bullying issue.

Although teachers said parental involvement was fundamental, they also said teachers were increasingly expected to act in the role of parents. Grace noted that, in her experience, most of the bullies she has seen did not have solid two-parent families. Teachers agreed that when students acted out aggression at school, the problem usually began at home, and it was the parent's responsibility to begin dealing with behavior issues when children were born. Helen said parents had too much of a "hands-off approach" when it came to parenting. She said,

> More is expected of us beyond academics and a lot of these kids are left with TVs
> and gaming systems and texting and that is their entertainment and very often
> family members are working or absent. They come from a single parent home, or
> they live with grandparents or even older brothers and sisters.

Many of the teachers commented that it was not enough for parents to simply be involved, but the level of involvement was also important. Frances recalled two students in her classroom, both from single parent homes, but one whose mother valued education and one whose mother was not as involved. One of the students was "atrociously mean to several students," and the other was a "really good kid and who did his best, tried really

hard, made good grades and understood the importance of having an education." She said the level of parental involvement made all the difference in the students' lives.

Teachers said they tried to get parents involved as quickly as possible when it came to bullying issues. They complained that although parents were generally very involved in their child's life when they were in elementary school, as they got older that involvement often diminished. Teachers asserted that parents needed to take more of an active role in their child's education and that they would like to see parents be more active in their children's lives, even to the point of having to take classes alongside their children. Helen said, "I think we are forcing educators and administrators to do jobs they weren't necessarily designed to do." She said parenting was a tremendous responsibility and needed to be taken more seriously.

Most teachers reported that they involved parents when dealing with bullying situations in the same way they involved them for other discipline issues. They said some parents were receptive to helping and some were not. Unfortunately, they said, a lot of times parents would say they did not have any more control over the child than the teacher did. Kenneth recalled one example of such a comment made by a parent. He said the parent told him, "I'll talk to him; we've talked about it before. I might have to get the switch out after him," Teachers believed that if parents were involved with their kids, they would not be as likely to bully others.

According to the teachers in the study, there was a difference between having parents in the building and having parents in their children's lives. They agreed that there should be more communication between parents and children, and that parents needed to know what their children were doing inside and outside of school. Many teachers said

that they often called parents to come to the school if their child was involved in a bullying situation. They acknowledged the fact that it was difficult to get parents to realize there was a problem without just coming out and saying "your child is a bully." Unfortunately, many teachers admitted that students who acted as bullies often did not have parents who wanted to be involved in their children's lives. Charles said parents would say things such as, "Well, you know it's hard for me to do anything with my child because they are growing up."

Teachers expressed that the process of informing parents about bullying was often difficult due to confidentiality issues. Since teachers could not reveal the names of the other child involved in a specific incident, teachers said it made it difficult for the parents to do much to help in the situation. Ingrid said that often parents already knew who the other students were, but she could not confirm or deny any other child's involvement.

In contrast to the responses some teachers gave in reference to a strong rural culture, some teachers said they thought parents needed to listen more to their child's teachers about what was going on at school, and that sometimes parents only wanted to defend their child, refusing to hear what the teachers were trying to tell them. They said that some parents were not willing to listen and that they often became defensive when they thought someone was telling them what was best for their child. Jessica said she blamed the rural culture and said people did not want someone telling them what they were doing wrong. "They take offense to that and so they keep those walls up and blame everyone else." She said often people moved into the area who were more "forward thinking," and their children did not take a lot of what kids said to heart.

Teachers agreed that students with bullying tendencies often never broke out of those patterns and that as they grew older they were caught for vandalism, drug abuse, or any number of illegal activities. They said things could be much different if the bullies had had support from their parents.

Team teaching. All of the teachers who were interviewed in this study said they taught in a team situation with two or three other teachers. The vast majority said team teaching was a positive strategy for dealing with student bullying. They said when working with a team, there were more teachers to help supervise students and that it provided a sense of small community with which they could interact. Also, they felt that team teaching allowed them to observe students in different situations throughout the day and to develop a clear picture of negative patterns which may turn into bullying situations. Teachers said common planning time was necessary for a positive, team-teaching situation. If they had common planning time, teachers said they were more likely to have time to discuss issues; making them more effective when dealing with bullying. One teacher noted that, although she was on a team with other teachers, her team was ineffective due to the fact that the teachers did not share the same students.

Teachers said being a part of a team was an advantage when dealing with student bullying, and that teaming helped to avoid putting students with issues together in a situation that could result in problems. They felt that through team teaching, they had the opportunity to talk about student peculiarities and to provide each other with insight as to what to watch out for in each student. Grace said, "Bullying comes up periodically in our team discussions." She added that, through her experiences as a former victim of

bullying, she was able to help her fellow teammates better understand and recognize bullying.

Teachers said it was an advantage to have others with whom they could compare observations. They said when discussing bullying issues it was helpful to have more than one teacher watching students and looking for problems. Helen said, "Team teaching, to me, is a very pivotal response, not to just bullying, but academic issues, problems, whatever, you can catch them and work together and then meet as a team with the parents, if that is necessary."

Teachers asserted that teaming provided them the opportunity to observe students and their behaviors more closely and in different situations. One example of how team teaching can be effective is when teachers have to deal with problems associated with the restrooms. Male teachers have a difficult time dealing with problems which take place in a female restroom. Likewise, female teachers have the same problem in male restrooms. Kenneth reported that his team had both male and female teachers and that although he could not go in and stop bullying in the girls' restroom, one of the female teachers on his team could. Likewise, Grace said there was one male teacher who taught seventh grade in her school. She found that having him on her team was beneficial because he provided insight into male bullying, and, students experienced having a male influence in their lives while at school.

According to the teachers who were interviewed, not only was student observation more effective in a team-teaching situation, but also teachers were better able to discuss and develop solutions. Frances commented that her team rearranged student schedules so that students who had issues with one another were separated. Ingrid added,

"As a team we can watch the students in all four classes and see the things that are going on and talk about if someone is picking on someone else." Teachers agreed that it was helpful to have a group of teachers working together, rather than having to deal with student bullying alone.

Teachers suggested that team teaching provided other benefits besides the resolution of bullying issues. They said it was important for adults to set a good example for students when it came to getting along with one another. They added that students saw how teachers behaved toward one another and how they dealt with situations. If students saw teachers being positive and helpful toward one another, it provided a good example of how to deal with others in a respectful fashion. Charles recalled his first year of teaching and said his more experienced teammates were very supportive and took him under their wings. He remarked, "I think if we had not been a strong team, a cohesive team, I think the students would have picked up on that and played on it." He noted that there were four team members and that any one of them could speak for the other. Many of the teachers said they met with students as a team regarding discipline issues. They said this practice helped them to communicate with one another more effectively and allowed students to see that teachers worked together and had the same expectations.

Most teachers said they had a good working relationship with their teammates. They said team teaching provided a comfortable situation in which they could communicate freely with one another. Jessica said team meetings provided her and the other teachers on her team the opportunity to discuss individual students and the problems they experienced.

Teachers listed communication as being very important when dealing with student bullying. They said having the time to communicate was equally important, and common planning times and duty-free lunch periods provided teachers with the opportunity to communicate effectively throughout the day. David commented that if bullying issues arose in a certain teacher's class, the entire group could talk about solutions and work-out problems. One teacher said, "We know what to look for, we know that student A is being bullied in the other teacher's class, and I might need to watch out for it in mine." Likewise, Linda said, "The more we compile information and suggestions and share teacher experiences, the more effectively we will be able to handle it." Teachers stressed the importance of allowing them opportunities to learn from each other by seeing and discussing how they each handled bullying in their own classrooms.

In one dissenting opinion, Barbara said, teaming was not very helpful in her particular case. Her particular example, however, was not an example of real teaming because she did not share students with other teachers. She added that, because of the fact that they did not share the same kids, she and her teammates could not communicate with one another about how a particular student was doing in each of their classes. She said the most positive aspect of team teaching in her school was the ease with which teachers could separate students who were having difficulties by sending them into other classes for time away from each other. She said her fellow teachers did, however, function as a great support group by communicating with one another and suggesting strategies on how to deal with bullying situations. She noted that she often thought that teachers who shared the same students had an advantage when it came to teaming because they could

communicate and make suggestions about student problems with which they were already very familiar.

Although team teaching may not be perfect for every situation, teachers who were interviewed in this particular study overwhelmingly said it was an effective intervention when dealing with problems associated with student bullying. In most cases, team teaching offered teachers the opportunity to more effectively communicate with one another when it came to student bullying. As members of a team, teachers said that they talked to both bullies and to victims to try to better understand what the students were experiencing.

Teachers suggested that because of the changes students went through, middle school was a hard time to bring students together, and team teaching allowed teachers the chance to provide more support for students during this crucial time. Elaine said that when she saw bullying-type behaviors occur; she talked to her team members individually. She said that they tried to communicate with one another and make each other aware of the issues they were seeing in their own classrooms.

Unsure How to Handle the Situation

Teachers reported that, unfortunately, there were times when they simply did not know how to deal with bullying situations. They said that because of legalities, unless they actually saw a bullying incident take place, there was nothing they could really do about the situation. Often teachers said they found themselves in uncomfortable situations such as communicating with parents about sensitive issues like hygiene. They reported that sometimes they did not have the communication skills to talk to parents about those

issues, and the result was that students continued to be ridiculed because the teacher did not know how to handle the situation.

Jessica, in her frustration of dealing with bullying, said she was often discouraged. She said that, if she had not actually witnessed a bullying event, she had to resort to "giving general speeches in my class about how bullying is the worst thing anybody can do to make somebody feel lower than they are." Similarly, Helen said that, in dealing with some bullying situations, she was at a loss as to how to deal with them and that some students did not seem to want to be helped. Some, she said, actually enjoyed bullying others for whatever reason.

Teachers noted that, unfortunately, some students just did not like other kids and sometimes they could not change that fact. Frances recalled a situation with one student who suffered from terrible hygiene issues. She said that, no matter what she did, she could never resolve the situation, and the bullying continued throughout the year. She reported feeling that she should have called the student's home but that it was very difficult to tell a parent that their child smelled bad and was overweight.

Professional Development and Participation in the Development of Policy

The final section of this chapter includes the amount of training and the kinds of training teachers receive to effectively deal with the problem of student bullying. As can be expected, the type and amount of training varies widely from teacher to teacher and school to school. This section also includes the level of involvement teachers have had in the development and implementation of anti-bullying policies in their schools or in their districts.

Professional Development Teachers Have Experienced

Most of the teachers who participated in this study have had very little training in how to deal with student bullying. They said the training sessions they have participated in have generally included limited, one-time work sessions provided by an outside consultant or a member of the law enforcement community. Two teachers said their schools have had extensive, ongoing support in the area of bullying due to the efforts of a system administrator who was an expert in bullying. Other teachers in the study listed district-wide initiatives on bullying which did not prove effective.

Four teachers reported that they had been through training sessions with a local school administrator who worked as a bullying expert and consultant. Adam recalled a district-wide training session with this consultant and said it was the only specific bullying training he could recall. "Other than that, I have not been to anything." David also said his county was very fortunate because to have a "Bully-Free" program in their schools. He added that his county had received ongoing training from an outside consultant, who had done a tremendous amount of work in the area of student bullying. He noted that teachers, administrators, and staff had been trained in how to recognize and address different kinds of bullying.

Some teachers noted that their district office had provided multiple anti-bullying resources in the form of handbooks, posters, and other materials. David said that teachers had the flexibility to incorporate sections of the "Bully Free Schools" initiative when they felt it was appropriate. Several teachers remarked that they had an outside consultant who did periodic assemblies, which involved their entire school and helped administrators develop and work with the school district's code of conduct regarding disciplinary issues.

Other teachers reported that, in addition to an outside consultant, their schools had also sent teams of teachers to training sessions with another expert, who was a nationally recognized, safe schools and bullying expert. Teachers said the training focused on his personal experiences with bullying and how to recognize when students were carrying weapons to school. Linda added that the training was "excellent," and that she would "highly recommend it." Other teachers said their districts provided training sessions on bullying and drug abuse which included members of local law enforcement.

Several teachers said they had participated in mediation-type training sessions with mixed results. Elaine said she attended mediation classes and learned how to recognize and to stop bullying situations. In addition, she attended a program called "Love and Logic," which she said helped in the effort to de-escalate a tense situation with a student. Grace also said she participated in a school-wide initiative based upon mediation training. She added that the intent of the training was to train students as mediators, but that the program "just fizzled out," and was never completed. Frances reported that her school participated in conflict resolution training called Mountain Mediation, which was directed by a Methodist minister. She said the program was designed to address bullying issues and was supposed to help instill in students a sense of respect for one another.

Absence of Professional Development

Teachers said their schools had not included bullying training for teachers as a high priority when planning professional development. Most teachers have had very little training; some have had no training at all. Marie said that after the Columbine incident, she went through a required training on bullying and student safety. She said outside of

that, she could not remember any specific anti-bullying program that she was a part of. Teachers listed military training or personal experiences from their youth as their only form of training in how to deal with bullying. Kenneth said his military training had given him credibility in students' eyes and that they generally trusted and respected him and do what he said. Because he has served in Iraq in actual terrorist fighting, he felt bullying did not bother him as it did other teachers.

Most of the teachers who were interviewed said they would be very interested in receiving more training at the school and at the district levels. They added that they had been forced to rely on their own personal experiences with bullying as a guide for how to deal with student bullying at school. Barbara said that, although she has never had any form of bullying training, her mother worked in group homes when she was young and she grew up with these "wild, crazy, juvenile delinquent kids, who they took from the juvenile delinquent center and brought over to live with us." She said those experiences were her only form of training and that her experience has proved very useful in her role as a teacher.

Teachers cited the lack of anti-bullying training that new teachers and teacher education candidates were exposed to in teacher education programs as a major issue. They stressed the need for teachers to receive more training for dealing with bullying; especially those new teachers who often did not know how to recognize bullying, or were unsure how to address it if they did recognize it. Jessica added that teacher education candidates would benefit from bullying training and that it should be included in teacher education programs.

Many of the teachers remarked that, although they had not received a great deal of training in how to deal with bullying, they had attended a few conferences, which included workshop sessions on how to recognize bullying. Teachers agreed that they would like to participate in more training, including training on how to help students who act as bullies to find something positive about themselves. Helen was not aware of any training ever taking place in her school, and if training had been provided at the school or district levels, she believed it would have occurred before she began teaching in the school.

<div style="text-align:center">Teacher Involvement in the Development of Policy</div>

Many teachers in this study had no idea whether teachers were involved in the development of bullying policy at the school or district level. Only one of the teachers said he was involved with policy development in regard to bullying. Teachers speculated that other teachers were probably involved in some form; most likely they said, through committees such as the School Improvement Team, Safe School's committee or PBS Committee. Adam added that he assumed the school improvement team was responsible for the development of the anti-bullying policy. He reasoned that participation on the part of the school improvement team, which had a representative from each team and grade level, would give teachers an indirect voice in deciding policy. Similarly, Ingrid and Jessica suggested that, if teachers were involved in the development of a bullying policy, it would have been through involvement of the school improvement team.

Most teachers said that, although they felt comfortable voicing opinions on bullying to administrators at the school or the district level, they were unsure if teachers were involved in the development of their school's anti-bullying policies. Some teachers

noted that they were unsure as to whether their schools even had an anti-bullying policy.

Most teachers said anti-bullying was simply a reference to the discipline policy which

consisted of writing-up students for bullying offences. Barbara said, "I would say, no,

teachers were probably not involved in the development of our anti-bullying policy."

Similarly, Frances remarked, "I don't know how much, if any, teachers have in

developing anti-bullying policy." Some teachers took a very negative view of the process

and believed that their school's policy had been probably developed by counselors and

administrators, that teachers probably had very little to do with writing it. They said that

although the school improvement team may help to develop policy, in all reality, that

policy would never be implemented. Elaine reported that teachers at her school appointed

a discipline committee, which developed the school's current discipline policy to address

bullying; however, she said she was not aware of a formal bullying policy.

On a positive note, one teacher noted that he and his colleagues were very

involved in the process of developing anti-bullying policy. David said he and other

teachers in his school were very much involved and were guided through the process by

administration and by a consultant. He added that teachers and staff examined each

policy to determine its effectiveness and were given the opportunity to make suggestions

and to change policy based upon the needs of each individual school.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR
FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' experiences with student
bullying in rural middle schools. Thirteen teachers who said they had previous experience
in dealing with student bullying participated in the study.

Research Procedures

The participants in this study volunteered based upon their interest in the topic
and their previous experience with student bullying in rural middle schools. Teachers'
identities were kept confidential throughout the study. All participants were interviewed
in individual sessions either at the schools in which they taught, or in a neutral location.
Teachers were asked open-ended questions about their individual experiences with
student bullying; interventions they had used or had seen others use; the amount of anti-
bullying training they had received; and their level of involvement in the development of
anti-bullying policies. Interviews were transcribed from microcassette tapes. Handwritten
notes were also taken during each interview. Transcriptions from the interviews were
categorized based upon their relationship to the research questions which guided the
study.

Data were analyzed using a process of inductive analysis as outlined by Patton
(1980). The first step of the process involved data reduction and a case analysis of the
transcripts in the form of teachers' stories or individual cases. The second step involved
unitization and a cross-case analysis which allowed me to divide the data into three
domains: (a) Teachers' Experiences with Student Bullying; (b) Interventions, and (c)

Professional Development and the Development of Policy. From these three domains

common sections, categories, and themes were identified through cross-case analysis.

The third step was categorization, which involved arranging the information into

common themes. The last step was verification, in which the findings were reviewed by

two independent readers.

<div align="center">Research Findings</div>

The interviews of the teachers in the study revealed a diverse set of experiences

related to student bullying in rural middle schools. Participants identified many different

episodes of student bullying which they had witnessed throughout their individual careers

as middle-school teachers. This section provides a summation of what teachers reported

experiencing, an application to existing research, and a personal analysis based upon my

findings.

Teachers' Experiences with Student Bullying

From their experiences, teachers' personal definitions of student bullying

emerged. The definitions served as each teacher's guide for how they interpreted the

problems associated with student bullying. These definitions also defined the responses

teachers used to deal with the problems in their classrooms or in their schools.

Cumulatively, teachers defined bullying as the process, in which one person makes

another person feel uncomfortable, threatened, scared, belittled, or excluded by focusing

on a certain weakness and intentionally exploiting that weakness in a repeated fashion.

Because of the many possible definitions of bullying, bullying exists as a socially

defined problem. What is or is not bullying is often based upon individual interpretations

of those who witness the event. Often teachers and students have problems

conceptualizing bullying. This fact is represented by the importance teachers place on being able to recognize the phenomenon when it takes place. Although most teachers did not have an extraordinary amount of anti-bullying training, many of the teachers had some training and exposure to bullying prevention. Whether or not teachers' personal definitions of bullying match the ones as stated in the training they had been through may affect how they dealt with bullying incidents at school. Teachers said that the students themselves revealed some confusion over whether or not they were actually bullying others. Many teachers talked about the need to educate students on the particulars of bullying. They said students often complained to teachers that they really did not know what they were doing was bullying. Although the definition of bullying as used in this study is based upon what is revealed in the literature, further research which examines the definitions the media use to define bullying may help to explain the heightened sense of alarm with which bullying is being reported.

Their experiences with student bullying revealed that, in their schools, most bullying occurs in less supervised situations. They listed class changes, hallways, the gym, restrooms, after school, and elective classes as the locations where most bullying incidents take place. Bullying was not as frequent in academic core classes or when students were with their team teachers, and although some verbal bullying and name calling took place, students were often too busy with coursework to take part in negative behaviors. The fact that teachers found most bullying to occur in less supervised areas was consistent with recent research, which finds that school playgrounds, the school bus, restrooms, and other isolated areas are places bullying frequently occurs (Blazer, 2005; Harrison, 2005; Wolke, Woods, Stanford, and Schulz, 2001).

The idea that most bullying takes place during transitions and in less supervised areas is not surprising. Students who have are intent on doing something they know will get them in trouble often look for opportunities to act when teachers are not watching. What was more interesting is the fact that several teachers commented that bullying takes place in elective and physical education classes more often than when students are in their core classes. This may suggest that core teachers do not see their colleagues who teach in elective situations as providing the same amount of structure; or that they may not have the same kind of trusting relationship with students.

Teachers identified the seriousness of the bullying issue and answered the question of whether or not bullying in schools was "overemphasized." In general, they considered bullying to be a serious issue and a concern to school personnel, students, and community members. This fact is consistent with research which states that teachers consider student bullying to be second only to drug use when discussing serious student behaviors (Borg, 1998). Teachers are very aware of the dangers students face at school each day. For those teachers who remember the Columbine tragedy, bullying will never be looked at in the same way again. Teachers can no longer afford to dismiss bullying as a minor offense. In general, teachers are pretty good at protecting students while at school, and they see many of the fears and allegations parents or members of the media raise about school safety as unwarranted. One teacher went so far as to use the term "far-fetched" to describe some of the stories parents have told about bullying at his school. Teachers said that student bullying incidents were often fueled by the local press which helped to bring the problem to the public's attention. This statement is supported by

research in Glazer (2007) which analyzed school violence and found that national public

opinion polls indicated the public felt the issue was a major concern.

Overall, teachers believed their individual school bullying policies and responses

from administration were appropriate. The fact that teachers felt their schools' anti-

bullying policies were appropriate depends upon the design of the policies themselves.

Smith, Smith, and Osborn (2008) asserted that most school policies failed to address

important issues such as responsibilities of school staff other than teachers, follow-up

after incidents occur, and specific preventative steps in less supervised areas such as the

playground. In addition, there was little difference between primary and secondary

schools' policies, and cyberbullying and homophobic bullying were seldom mentioned.

In looking at teacher's responses, although most related the fact that their school

policies were appropriate, they raised serious concerns about policy effectiveness.

Teachers often complained that administrative decisions concerning disciplinary matters

were ineffective. In addition, teachers, by their own responses, indicated that they had

very little voice in developing these policies. More than one teacher could not identify

whether or not the school even had an anti-bullying policy, and some teachers said they

knew the school had one, but they had never read it. These facts suggest the possibility

that teachers were afraid to say anything which would cast their school's administration

or policy making process in a negative light.

Because of recent episodes of school violence, which have gained national

attention, the teachers in the study said school personnel could not afford to overlook

incidents of student bullying, no matter how trivial they might appear. The importance of

administrative support can be substantiated by research from the Gay, Lesbian, and

Straight Education Network (2008) which found that a supportive principal was an essential key to a more tolerant school climate.

According to the teachers interviewed, one of the main reasons students bully one another is to gain a sense of control or exert power over others in some way or form. They noted that often these students were lacking control in their own lives and they attempted to gain control by targeting others. This statement is consistent with research by the Brewster and Railsback (2001) which stated that bullies have the need to prove dominance over others. Teachers also acknowledged that some students simply bullied others to be "mean," and that those students were in fact very confident and in control. This is also consistent with research by Shellard (2002) which found that bullies often elicited pleasure from making others suffer.

In reviewing the teacher interviews, teachers often stated that students who bully are attempting to gain power and status in some way. Power and status are critical elements which are emphasized throughout the study. Students attempt to gain power and status through power differentials such as maturity or appearance. Students who appear to be more mature may be seen by their peers as having a greater social standing.

Power in numbers is another way students gain power over others. Often, students will demonstrate a pack mentality by ganging up on other students or they will appoint an unofficial "leader of the pack" who will direct students to victimize other students. While the students who bully gain social status and popularity, those who are targeted often receive ongoing harassment and humiliation at their own expense. Physical power is another way students gain power over one another. Those students who possess a

physically stronger stature often target weaker students in the attempt to demonstrate their power over others and establish dominance in front of their peers.

Psychological power is another way students exert power and gain status over their peers. Through exclusion and spreading rumors, students have the opportunity to not only gain social status personally, but also to take it away from their peers. Popularity was a major contributor to bullying in rural middle schools according to the teachers in the study. They asserted that students had the desire to be noticed by their peers and to be accepted into certain social groups. Teachers said that oftentimes bullying involved students who were desperately attempting to be perceived as one of the "popular kids," and that exclusion from these groups could be devastating to middle-school students. According to the teachers, most students at the middle-school age would rather be bullied than to be excluded. In addition, they said bullies also sometimes targeted others for acceptance. Teachers reported observing frequent incidents when a student would target others because he or she thought it made him or her look good in front of friends. The horror of not being able to "fit it" can be devastating for students of this age. By causing students not to be accepted by the group, bullies establish dominance over their peers and secure their own position of status within the school community. These findings are supported in a study by Cohn and Canter (2003) which stated that students often bullied others in an attempt to win the respect of their peers.

In some cases, students even exert power over teachers or others who are in a position of authority. Teachers told stories about being victimized in their schools and classrooms which ranged from simple name calling to physically keeping them from calling for help. For students at this age, confronting authority figures is the ultimate

exercise of power and the absolute establishment of their position of status in the school community. Power and status are crucial and essential to middle school students. Students often attempt to belittle others in the attempt to gain power and status, and may use any means necessary to do so.

Although they said physical bullying was a problem in their schools, teachers also identified verbal bullying, exclusion, and psychological bullying as more common forms. This fact is consistent with a study by Lleras (2009) which showed that nearly one in every five students experienced "put-downs" at the hands of their peers. Perhaps because teachers are constantly watching and supervising students, physical bullying does not take place as often as more psychological methods of bullying. It is much easier to call someone a name or whisper a threat or derogatory comment than it is to punch someone. In addition, school rules and policies for physical altercations are more defined in that students know if they hit someone they are likely to be suspended from school. Physical bullying incidents such as hitting, spitting, kicking, etc., are often hidden, and students who use these methods try to do it in such a way that no one will see it happen.

Many of the teachers in the study identified themselves as previous bullying victims, either as a child or as teachers in their present schools. They said their experiences helped them in dealing with student bullying and added that they felt they had an advantage over teachers who had not been through such an experience because they were more aware of what victims went through on a daily basis. This finding is supported in the research by studies, which indicated that victims of bullying can suffer problems that follow them into adulthood and can result in depression and anxiety (Blazer, 2005). It was interesting that many of the teachers who identified themselves as

former victims of bullying volunteered to participate in this study. Teachers who are former victims may be more aware of bullying type behavior and thus better able to recognize it when it takes place. Teachers who are former victims often do not have a lot of tolerance for students who bully others and they often see themselves as having a special bond with those students who are victims. These teachers have a special interest in working to help stop bullying in school and can possibly serve as a valuable resource for administrators and researchers who are trying to design interventions and policies with which to combat the problem.

Because of their personal experiences, the teachers who were interviewed expressed that the ability to recognize bullying was crucial when dealing with the problem. The importance of knowing their students and having experienced bullying on a personal level helped them to determine the difference between innocent play and harmful bullying.

In order to truly be able to recognize bullying, teachers need three things: experience, professional development, and the ability to know their students. While experience will come with time, it is important for teachers to have professional development opportunities which will allow them to better recognize the nuances of bullying. In addition, it is crucial for teachers to develop a relationship with their students which will allow them to better understand the subtleties of their students' individual personalities. Teachers should know who hangs with whom, and who is afraid of whom in order to help deter bullying in their classrooms.

Teachers reported that most bully victims were targeted because they exhibited some sort of difference, or they appeared weaker in some way than their peers, and that

these victims often inadvertently made themselves easily available for torment. Physical differences such as a disability or a different hairstyle, while potential targets, were not always reasons to be picked on. Shellard (2002) and Kreidler (1996) reported that students were not often targeted exclusively for their appearance. Batche and Knoff (1994) and Olweus (1993) found that victims tended to be weaker than their aggressors.

Students are targeted for any number of reasons, and it is very difficult to identify which student is a potential victim. The presence of a physical difference does not automatically insure a student will be targeted, and many students who have disabilities or physical impairments enjoy the same degree of power and status that students without disabilities enjoy. In addition, hair style, style of dress, physical stature, expensive clothing, or the lack of any of these attributes may or may not cause students to be targeted. The underlying issue which causes students to be targeted is often simply that they exhibit some sort of difference not readily accepted by the group which enjoys power and status at the time. In this way middle school bullying reflects the attitude of society as a whole in that if someone voices a different opinion, acts in a certain way, wears out-of-date clothes, or talks too much, he or she may not enjoy the same status and power of those who do. The result, whether it is in middle school or our society at large, is often persecution at the hands of those who are in power at the time.

According to the teachers' experiences, size did not always matter when it came to bullying as sometimes larger students were the victims. Teachers said any differences, whether they were social or physical, could cause a student to become targeted, and the nuances could often be too subtle for teachers or other adults to see, at least in the beginning. The fact that teachers and students sometimes have different perceptions of

student bullying can be substantiated by studies such as Crothers and Kolbert (2004) who reported differences in how teachers and student perceived bullying and found that, although teachers rated some anti-bullying programs as effective, students did not necessarily agree.

Some of the teachers in this study said the fact that students were immature and were less able to follow social cues, along with the fact that the socialization process became extremely important to kids during the middle-school years, helped to create a situation in which students could cause themselves to be targeted. Teachers revealed that some students acted in a manner which was socially unacceptable to the other students, and confusing to the teachers themselves. They said in many cases students were looking for a certain "shock value," in the attempt to gain attention from others. According to Brewster and Railsback (2001) students who bullied others had the need to prove dominance over their victims. In another study by Oliver, Hoover, and Hazier (1994) students who bullied others often saw their victims at least partly to blame due to their physical weakness and poor social skills.

The fact that many teachers, even those who had been victims themselves, see students who are victims as bringing bullying upon themselves is quite disturbing. Teachers talked about the idea of the self-fulfilling prophecy in which the more bullying is talked about; the more it will likely happen. Some teachers even mentioned that bullying is simply a part of life that kids need to learn to live with. The problem is that because they think students bring bullying upon themselves they are essentially buying into the bully's mentality. Because they think students are partly to blame, they are in

effect condoning the behavior. One teacher even talked about the idea of "being the bigger bully" as a means to stop bullying in his classroom.

Although some students may demonstrate actions which their peers deem as unacceptable, this is no reason for them to suffer victimization at the hands of their peers. Many teachers said they simply could not understand why students act the way they do in certain situations, although they should know the end result will be getting picked on. The idea that some teachers may see their victims as being at least partly to blame for their own victimization raises the question of teacher empathy toward students. The possibility that these students demonstrate behaviors which not only irritate their peers, but also their teacher is a dark prospect for student victims. To be sure, teachers do reach a point where their patience is tested, but is it possible that since teachers see some victims as responsible for their own victimization, a small population of teachers might "look the other way" in certain situations? The idea that teachers somehow absolve themselves of the responsibility of having to deal with student bullying because the victims themselves are to blame, or because they themselves do not have the skills to address certain situations, or because as one teacher, put it: it is not their job to educate the whole student, raises serious implications for the way teachers view and address student bullying.

Several of the teachers who were involved in the study said that, at times, they were unsure as to how to handle bullying issues. They complained that because of legal issues, unless they actually saw a student bullying another child, there was not much they could do. They talked about a few incidents they had experienced which they would have done differently if given the opportunity. In one situation, a student who was being

targeted continued to be ridiculed because the teacher said she did not have the skills to talk to the parents about the issue. The suggestion is that some teachers are unwilling to step in and confront these or other tough issues. Whether this is true or not, students who are victims are definitely not at fault for being picked on and it is important to provide them with support and help when they need it. No one deserves to be harassed, humiliated, intimidated or abused simply because they do not speak, act, look, or dress in the same way as the majority.

Popularity was a major contributor to bullying in rural middle schools according to the teachers in the study. They asserted that students had the desire to be noticed by their peers and to be accepted into certain social groups. Teachers said that often times bullying involved students who were desperately attempting to be perceived as one of the "popular kids," and that exclusion from these groups could be devastating to middle-school students. According to teachers, most students at the middle-school age would rather be bullied than excluded. In addition, they said bullies also sometimes targeted others for acceptance. Teachers reported observing frequent incidents where a student would target others because he or she thought it made him or her look good in front of friends. These findings are supported in a study by Cohn and Canter (2003) which stated that students often bullied others in an attempt to win the respect of their peers.

Teachers said the physical, emotional, and psychological changes students go through during puberty helped to promote bullying at this level. According to the teachers, students often did not understand the changes that their bodies and minds were going through. They said the result was often frustration not only with themselves, but also with others. They added that students who were just beginning to see changes in

their bodies might pick at others who looked a little different, and that often they were attempting to take the focus off of their own physical insecurities. Teachers said as students are beginning to develop an identity they can often experience confusion and anxiety. These findings are consistent with research by Erikson (1970) who said adolescence is a critical age in which students are developing their individual identities. In addition, Marcia (1966) in his theory of identity status in adolescence suggested that there are four stages related to the development of a healthy identity. Identity achievement is the stage in which an adolescent explores possible identities and makes a commitment to one. Identity diffusion refers to the stage in which a student has neither an identity crisis nor a commitment. Identity foreclosure refers to the stage in which a student has made a commitment without exploring other possible identities. Finally, the moratorium stage refers to the stage in which a student is in the process of exploring identities but has not made a commitment to one. Because of the frustration and confusion associated with puberty, middle school is a crucial time of development for students who are attempting to identify their place in the world and to secure their individual identities. Teacher support and understanding is essential at this point in students' lives and they need to know they have an adult with whom they can talk in time of need.

According to the teachers interviewed, bullying occurs in middle school regardless of gender with incidents of female bullying happening just as frequently as incidents of male bullying. They reported seeing differences in how bullying was approached depending upon gender, observing that, whereas boys tended to be more physically aggressive, girls tended to use more subtle methods such as verbal bullying or

exclusion to intimidate one another. This finding is supported by the research in several studies including Batche and Knoff, (1994); Nolin, Davies, and Chandler, (1995); Olweus, (1993); and Whitney and Smith, (1993). Teachers reported that there were very few incidents of cross-gender bullying, but that it did take place from time to time. Because cross-gender bullying was not identified as a frequent form of bullying, the ability for teachers to identify episodes of sexual harassment is brought into question. Given the fact that students at this age are developing physically, and are beginning to notice one another in a sexual way casts a shadow of doubt over the fact that there are not more incidents of sexual harassment or teasing. The possibility exists that any harassment which occurs may be so subtle that it is not easily identified. At least one teacher suggested that any incidents of cross-gender bullying may simply be innocent flirting between boys and girls. It is important that teachers understand the difference between actions which may be identified as either simple innocent flirting and those that represent actual sexual harassment.

In relation to race and racial bullying, teachers said that this type of bullying did occur in their rural schools. Most of the racial bullying was focused on members of the Hispanic community who were targeted by White students. Because the schools under study were not extremely diverse, teachers said most racial bullying was limited. They reported that African-American students, while targeted, were not victimized as often as their Hispanic counterparts. Teachers said the racial bullying that occurred generally involved exclusion and students of different ethnic groups did not usually associate with those outside of their groups. Although incidents of racial bullying were specific to individual schools in the study and the degree of diversity in those schools, a study by

DeVoe et al. (2004) found that White students were more likely to report being bullied than Hispanic or African American students.

Teachers mentioned the fact that they themselves worried about the influence of a new culture on their rural area and the implications for those very rural students in the area. They also mentioned the underlying cultural theme which identifies Hispanics as being "illegal." The rural culture by nature is mistrusting of outsiders. This fact could possibly lead to more incidents of racial bullying in these rural schools if there were to be an influx of students who represent a different race or culture. The fact that the schools in this study are not very diverse means that there are not many incidents of racial bullying taking place. However, the potential for racial bullying exists and is well documented by the teachers' stories concerning Hispanic, African American and Asian American students.

The seriousness of cyberbullying was confirmed in a study by Juvonen and Gross (2008) which stated that 72% of students who participated in the survey reported being bullied online within the period of 1 year. Even in rural settings the teachers listed cyberbullying as one of their newest concerns in regard to student bullying. Through electronic means such as cell phones or e-mails, teachers said students threatened or intimidated others in ways that were very hard for teachers to address. They cited several incidents where students had taken inappropriate photographs of one another and spread them throughout the school. Although most schools' policies prohibited students from using cell phones at school, teachers said students were very savvy, and often used them without teachers' knowledge. According to the teachers, the fact that schools did not

check student cell phones or e-mail accounts made cyberbullying a very difficult problem to stop.

Cyberbullying is a quickly growing form of intimidation and harassment and it can happen anywhere and at any time. Schools are often powerless to deal with the problem because the tools students use are often their personal electronic devices which school officials neither have the resources, nor the desire to search. Students often do not possess the maturity or the reasoning skills to realize the implications of doing things like sending threatening messages or inappropriate pictures to one another. The result of such actions can lead to legal troubles such as fines, law suits and possible criminal records. Because cyberbullying often takes place off campus, the support of parents is crucial in stopping it.

Teachers had different opinions regarding whether bullying was augmented or diminished by the rural communities they served. While many teachers discussed the fact that a common heritage existed which was unique to the rural culture and encouraged respect for fellow students, some said the same common heritage actually promoted bullying by advancing the notions of bigotry and intolerance. These teachers acknowledged that the rural environment established a "pecking order" which promoted the idea that bullying was less of a problem than it actually was. Other teachers said they were not sure or that they saw no differences in the rural environment's effect on student bullying. The polarization of teachers' responses may be indicative of a misunderstanding of rural bullying or confusion on the part of teachers between rural schools and small schools. Most of the teachers in the study agreed that there were fewer incidents of bullying in their rural middle schools due to the smaller size of their schools. Research

does not support the idea that there are fewer incidents of bullying in rural schools. Numerous rural schools studies including Dulmus, Theriot, Sowers and Blackburn (2004) and Harris and Isernhagen (2003) reported that between 75% and 82% of students have been affected by bullying.

The idea that the rural environment contributes to bullying cannot be justified by this study. One topic which was mentioned repeatedly was the idea that the rural culture was accepting of some and not others. What for some is an ideal model of society which is represented by a common cultural heritage that respects tradition and caring, is for others a way to keep others out by isolating the differences in people who represent a different culture, race, or heritage. Even teachers themselves worried about the affect of outsiders on their rural students. The implication of this question is that the rural environment is often concerned with the preservation of a certain way of life and is resistant to change from the outside. The encroaching diversity represents a challenge to the status quo, which is upsetting to those who want to keep things as they are.

A supportive principal is deemed as an effective key to tolerance in schools (GLSN, 2008). In most cases, these teachers felt supported by administrators when it came to bullying. They perceived administrative support as crucial to dealing with student bullying and they felt better when bullies were dealt with in a tough manner. Because of increased attention to bullying from the media and from their respective communities, they said administrators were more aggressive in dealing with bullying problems than they once had been. Teachers stressed the importance of consistency when dealing with student bullying and believed administrators must set an example for students and let them know the behaviors that would not be tolerated.

When asked, the teachers in the study repeatedly stated that they felt supported by their administration. However, teachers often raised concerns over the way administrators handled situations in their respective schools. Several teachers commented that wholesale suspension of students is ineffective and provides most students with a day off from school. Teachers repeatedly stated that they were not involved in policy development which raises the question of whether they think their opinions matter to administrators. Perhaps worst of all, one teacher even talked about being held captive in her classroom, and receiving no help from the administration. The fact that teachers raise these points suggests there may be a question of whether they truly think their administration is supportive.

Interventions

Through individual interviews, teachers revealed the interventions they have used or have seen used which have proven successful or unsuccessful in dealing with student bullying. The idea of a trusting relationship as an effective intervention was substantiated in the literature by Rigby (2001) who reported the need to deal proactively and constructively rather than negatively with students and to support victims at school. Teachers cited the development of a trusting relationship between teachers and students more frequently than any other intervention mentioned. Throughout all of the interviews, they said time and again that developing trust was one of the most important things they could do as a teacher. It was very important that students have someone they could discuss their problems with and turn to in time of need. Overwhelmingly, they said they felt students could trust them, and that students felt as though they could come to them to discuss problems with bullying. They stressed the concept of community building in their

classrooms stating that it was important to constantly reinforce the idea of mutual respect between teacher and students. They added that, if students did not feel they had someone to talk to, they could feel isolated and helpless in dealing with bullying. They said students were often embarrassed to talk to adults about bullying and it helped to have someone they could trust. The idea of a trusting relationship as an effective intervention was substantiated in the literature by Rigby (2001) who reported the need to deal constructively rather than negatively with students and to support victims at school.

The idea that the development of a trusting relationship between teachers and students has great implications for the way schools are structured and the ways resources are allocated. Teachers talk about the formation of classroom communities and the idea that getting to know their students is essential to being able to meet their students' needs. This idea is a foreign notion to many who consider the legal problems associated with getting "too close" to students. Teachers, by their own statements, talk about the problems associated with getting parents involved in the lives of their children and the fact that many parents often rely too much on the schools to raise their kids. If students do not have support at home, it is important that they have a trusting adult at school that can help them in a time of need.

The idea that most school systems are moving to bigger, consolidated schools raises serious questions about the teacher-student relationships in those schools. Teachers said they consider it essential for students to have someone they can trust. They also said the ability to know their students is crucial in recognizing bullying type behavior. While larger schools are not necessarily impersonal, these schools must work to maintain an

atmosphere which allows students to see teachers and authority figures as someone they can talk to.

Another effective intervention teachers mentioned in their interviews was the use of the team-teaching model. A study by Adamski and Ryan (2008) confirmed the idea of team building as an intervention and said students who were exposed to these tools became empowered and better equipped to deal with bullies. Team teaching goes hand-in-hand with the idea of community building in that team teaching allows the formation of a small community of teachers and students. This small community allows more open communication and familiarity, closer relationships with students and teachers, as well as support when issues of bullying arise. The idea of team teaching also lends itself well to the notion that rural schools have fewer bullying problems because of their smaller size. All of the teachers who were interviewed in this study said they taught in a team situation with two or three other teachers. All but one teacher said team teaching was a positive strategy when dealing with student bullying. They listed increased student supervision as one reason why team teaching was successful. With more teachers to watch, they felt there were more opportunities to make sure kids were safe and out of trouble. They said team teaching allowed them the opportunity to observe students throughout the day and to see what behavior patterns began to emerge. Because team teaching allowed time for teacher discussion, they said they were able to discuss specific students and to plan interventions in order to deal with negative behaviors. The teachers added that, one of their main concerns was that teachers were allowed to have common planning time. Without it, they said team teaching was often not as successful.

Although the teachers in the study repeatedly stated the benefits of the team teaching model, the current trend in many schools is to eliminate this model of instruction. The ability to better target test scores has been listed as a reason to move to a more self-contained type of instruction in some schools. The benefits of the team teaching model are well documented; whereas the need to move away from this model is not as clear. Administrators and policy makers would be wise to move slowly in their decisions about team teaching, and to consider the possible negative effects on both teachers and students before leaving this very effective instructional model.

Teachers who were interviewed said another effective intervention strategy was the close observation of students. They stressed the importance of constantly watching students and looking for bullying-type behaviors. Dake, Price, Telljohann and Funk (2003) supported the idea that teachers could address bullying and the issues students face at school due to the amount of time they spent with students. Teachers had to be especially observant during less supervised times such as during class changes or bathroom breaks. They noted that, because of the number of students for which they were responsible, it was not always easy to observe students in every situation. Most of the teachers said their schools required them to be in their doorways during less supervised times. Some of the teachers expressed concern, however, because if they happened to be helping a student during class change, their ability to supervise others was limited. They worried that, despite their best efforts, they could often miss episodes of student bullying, and a few teachers added that they were glad their schools had installed cameras to help supervise students. They acknowledged, however, that teacher observation was in most cases one of the most effective interventions for stopping student bullying.

Schools regularly invest thousands of dollars installing cameras and other technological means of monitoring students at school. The use of such equipment can greatly enhance teacher's ability to see what students are doing and address the issues they find. For all the equipment a school can install, teacher observation remains the most effective means of monitoring student behavior. Teachers, because of the nature of their job, have the unique opportunity to witness the intricacies associated with student bullying. Their ability to know their students and the complexities of their students' personalities allows them to better recognize when something is simply "not right" about their students' behaviors. The caring, watchful eye of a teacher can help to deter many incidents of bullying

Teachers expressed their appreciation for their school counselors and said they were very effective when dealing with student bullying. According to the teachers, some of the effective strategies these counselors used included therapy, mediation and friendship groups. Adamski and Ryan (2008) suggested the importance of school counseling services in their study, which outlined role-playing, journal writing, open discussions, and team building activities to promote positive social interaction among students. One teacher said her counselor offered sign-up times for students to come to her office when they felt the need to talk to someone, or if something was troubling them. Teachers also talked about how they used counseling techniques in their classrooms and stressed the need for the counselor to conduct bullying classes as a part of the regular education curriculum.

Counselors can help in dealing with bullying situations because they often have the skills needed to be able to help students through crisis situations. Unfortunately, there

is usually only one counselor per school and he or she is often overworked. Teachers are often inhibited because they feel they do not have the experience or the expertise to be able to help students. Several teachers related the fact that they simply do not know what to say in certain situations. While there is never a "magic bullet solution," counselors can help teachers by providing guidance in how to deal with specific situations, by conducting anti-bullying classes in the regular or special education classrooms, or by providing an open door for students to come to them when they have problems.

As a part of character education, many of the teachers said their schools were initiating programs such as Positive Behavioral Support (PBS). They said these programs were often an effective intervention for dealing with student bullying and stressed the importance of integrating character education throughout the curriculum as a way to promote student pride and to help deter bullying. In a study by DeLara (2000) students suggested character-education programs as a vehicle for promoting belonging in the schools. Teachers added that character education was important and that schools needed to help students develop a sense of pride in their school in the hopes that it would deter them from bullying one another. They said effective character-education programs rewarded students for positive behaviors, such as treating each other with respect and friendship.

The research related to bullying prevention programs however, is not as supportive. In a meta-analysis by Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, and Isava (2008) outcomes of bullying intervention programs showed no meaningful change in bullying behaviors. Results suggest that intervention programs do not meaningfully impact student bullying,

and most likely have a greater impact on issues, such as knowledge, attitude, and self-perceptions.

Character education programs are very popular in schools right now. The most effective being the programs which allow school staff and students to have a role in designing the programs themselves. A school wide emphasis on addressing problem behavior provides a strong sense of positive culture throughout the school. By participating in an agreed upon set of acceptable behaviors and consequences which were designed through the input of all stakeholders, students have a better sense of what is considered right and wrong in their schools.

Parental involvement was mentioned by several teachers as an effective way to deal with student bullying. They stressed the importance of clear communication with parents and said it was critical that parents knew how their children were behaving at school. Although not all parents were willing to help with bullying, they found most parents were interested in what was going on with their children and wanted to know that their kids were safe at school. According to the teachers who were interviewed, parents were more likely to help if they thought their child was the victim. If their child was the bully, however, teachers said parents were often not as likely to help. A study by Dake, Price, Telljohann, and Funk (2003) emphasized the need for parental involvement and suggested that communication between teachers and parents could help to stop bullying-type behaviors.

Professional Development

Teachers were asked what training opportunities they had been a part of in regard to student bullying. Most teachers said that they had very little training in this field. They

added that the training they had taken part in was provided by their schools or districts and usually included an outside consultant or a member of law enforcement. Some of the teachers said they had taken part in various mediation training initiatives, some of which had not been implemented successfully. Only two of the teachers who were interviewed said they had been exposed to extensive training in the field of student bullying and felt confident in their ability to deal with bullying issues.

Other teachers who were interviewed said they had not had any formal training in regard to student bullying and believed their schools had not placed a high priority in providing any such training to staff. The lack of professional development in relation to bullying is supported in a study by Benitez, Garcia-Berben and Fernandez-Cabezas (2009) who reported that teachers, although directly affected by bullying, received very little training on how to deal with student bullying. In addition, Rigby (2001) and Rowan (2007) stressed the importance of professional development and classroom management skills development as an effective intervention for dealing with student bullying. Teachers listed training in the military or personal experiences as the training, which guided them in how to deal with student bullying. Overall, teachers said they would be interested in having more training in how to deal with bullying and suggested that teacher education programs focus more on this issue as a part of teacher training.

The fact that teachers identified workshops, conferences, materials and pamphlets as their main sources of anti-bullying training reveals a problem with the design of the training itself. In order to be effective, professional development must be ongoing and relevant to the problems teachers face. Teachers on the whole, said they had very little professional development when it comes to dealing with bullying. On the other hand,

they listed several examples of training sessions they had taken part in. The reason for this discrepancy is probably due to the fact that the training they had was not very meaningful and probably did not specifically address the problems teachers face on a daily basis.

Teacher Involvement in the Development of Policy

Of all the teachers who were interviewed in this study, only one said he was involved in the development of the school's student bullying policy. He reported that teachers were able to make suggestions and recommendations in order to meet the needs of each individual school in the district. A study by Druck and Kaplowitz (2005) reported that teachers were often frustrated with their school's policies on school violence and had very little input in the development of the policies, although they were ultimately responsible for their implementation.

Other teachers reported that they were not involved in the development of policy at all. Some speculated that members of the school improvement team or some other committee may have been involved in developing policy. One teacher said that her school had appointed a committee to address bullying and discipline issues but that she was not aware of any specific bullying policy.

The fact that teachers did not see themselves as being an essential part of policy development suggests that they are unaware of the process for policy development as a whole. They correctly speculated that if teachers were involved in the development of policy, it was probably through committees such as the School Improvement Team. If administrators include teachers in the decision making process, the fact that teachers are unaware of this process represents a serious communication issue between teachers and

administration. Because of their unique opportunity to witness the issues students face on a first-hand basis, schools should work to include teachers in the development of policy on a regular basis. Research shows that schools which involve teachers in the decision making process have a stronger sense of buy-in from teachers; foster a more communicative, collaborative, and positive school climate; and develop more successful anti-bullying policies. Through the use of professional learning communities, schools can easily enlist the help of teachers in the development of policy.

<div align="center">Implications</div>

Teachers' Experiences

This study examined teachers' experiences and perceptions of student bullying in five rural middle schools. Teachers' experiences were varied and interviews yielded a large amount of rich data, which served to present a clearer picture of teachers' observations of student bullying and behavior on a day-to-day basis. The information gained from this study will help researchers and school personnel to gain a better sense of teacher perspectives of student bullying in rural middle schools. It will also serve as a suggested guide as to what resources, strategies, and professional development teachers need in order to better deal with the problems associated with student bullying.

Teacher interviews revealed the need for more adult supervision in less structured areas of the school buildings, as well as less structured times of the day. Schools should focus resources so that they can better deal with these problems. Some teachers stated character education programs, such as Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) have proved effective by creating a school-wide focus on these problem areas and times. It is possible that the introduction of such programs may help to address these issues.

The fact that teachers considered bullying to be a serious issue is not surprising. However, they also felt as though bullying problems were overemphasized by the media or parents. A school-wide, positive, media campaign with the local communities they serve, along with the attempt to incorporate more parental involvement, might prove to be successful in addressing the misconceptions of student bullying in schools. Better communication and community involvement may also help to promote a sense of "buy-in" from stakeholders such as parents and community members.

It should be noted that North Carolina law requires all schools to have anti-bullying and harassment training for school personnel and students by March 1, 2010 (NCSBA, 2010). Because this study was conducted before the legislation came into effect, individual schools' plans for implementation and the types of training offered are not known.

Bullying takes many shapes and forms in schools. Teachers who were interviewed said bullying could be physical, as in the form of fights and altercations; or it could be psychological and in the form of verbal bullying, exclusion, and intimidation. Students, faculty, and staff should be trained in how to recognize bullying and how to stop bullying-type behaviors. After conducting needs assessments, school wide initiatives and bully prevention programs can be put into place to address specific types of bullying occurring in schools.

Through the interviews, teachers revealed several reasons why students bullied other students. School personnel can use this information to act in a more proactive manner in addressing students who bully others. Teachers, parents, and school counselors

should work together in an attempt to talk to bullies and, at times, provide therapy to address underlying problems such as the need to control others.

Teachers said most bully victims were targeted because they exhibited some sort of difference, or they appeared weaker in some way than their peers. Because teachers said there were many different reasons students were targeted for bullying, it was often difficult for teachers to identify potential victims until they had already been targeted. Schools should focus efforts on putting into place the supports which help students who are victimized to be able to develop better coping skills.

Teachers said problems with student bullying often arose out of developmental needs of students. As students begin to mature, they develop the need to be recognized and liked by their peers. The physical, emotional, and psychological changes students go through during puberty helps to promote bullying at this level. Students often have difficulty relating to one another, and sometimes focus anger issues or their own insecurities onto others in an attempt to take the focus off of themselves. Students at this age often do not have the social skills needed to develop good relationships with their peers. School personnel may seek to address these issues through school-wide bullying classes which focus on the development of socialization skills. School counselors often incorporate strategies such as friendship groups and group therapy to help students learn how to get along with one another and develop healthy relationships.

According to teachers, student bullying was not gender specific and both males and females participated in bully-type behaviors. The fact that males tended to bully one another in a more physical manner and females tended to use more psychological methods suggests there may be a need for more gender-specific interventions. Schools

may choose to incorporate anti-bullying strategies into physical education classes, which are normally separated by gender, and taught by members of the same gender.

Teachers said they had not observed an extraordinary amount of racial bullying. However, they acknowledged that it did take place in their schools from time to time. The fact that the schools in the study were not very diverse may suggest that this study does not represent a clear picture of the overall bullying problem as it relates to racial issues.

The use of technology as a weapon associated with bullying was listed as a growing concern for teachers who participated in the study. While schools should recognize the problems with cyberbullying and work to address these problems, the potential to use technology as a legitimate tool for instruction cannot be overlooked. Schools should work to strike a healthy balance recognizing both the pros and the cons. In addition, schools should work to involve parents in the development of strategies for dealing with this problem. Parental involvement is crucial in this issue as it is most often the parents who make it possible for students to acquire the technology. Since most cyberbullying takes place after school or off school grounds, parents must share the responsibility for helping to monitor their children's technology use.

From information gained in the study, it was unclear as to how much the rural environment contributes to student bullying. What became increasingly clear, however, was the fact that small schools seemed to experience fewer problems with bullying, have the potential for a stronger sense of community, and promote better communication within the school environment. Some clarification regarding the difference between rural culture and mountain culture is needed. Teachers listed both pros and cons associated with bullying in the rural environment.

Teachers discussed the importance of parental involvement and said it is crucial to have parent support when dealing with bullying issues. At least one teacher described a healthy relationship with parents and said all he had to do was call the parents and the bullying problem would be solved. Schools should work to involve parents in a more productive role such as involvement on school committees or Parent-Teacher Organizations. By gaining parental input, schools will be able to design more effective anti-bullying policies, they will be better able to identify problems students are facing in schools, and they will gain valuable support from parents who will serve as a positive resource when dealing with bullying.

Teachers said they felt supported by administrators in regard to student bullying. Some of their responses however, suggest that they are often less than satisfied with administrators' responses to the problems of bullying. Administrators should work to incorporate teachers in the development of anti-bullying policies and procedures on a larger scale. The development of Professional Learning Communities as a tool for communicating ideas and discussion may serve to enhance anti-bullying interventions on a school-wide basis.

Interventions

Teachers stressed the importance of developing a trusting relationship with their students as the most effective intervention for dealing with student bullying. This suggests that students and teachers feel the need to have someone whom they can turn to in time of need. Since bullying can be a traumatic experience, it is reasonable to suggest that schools focus resources on helping teachers develop nurturing relationships with their students. Teacher training programs such as sensitivity training may prove useful in

alerting teachers and administrators to the emotional needs of their students. Sensitivity training is a type of training that was used in education circles more frequently in the 1990s but could prove invaluable in addressing the emotional needs of students today. Through sensitivity training, teachers can develop skills such as communication, tolerance, and conflict resolution which they need in order to help develop a healthy, trusting relationship with students.

School counselors serve as their school's authority on students' emotional health. Schools should use counselors in a more productive manner by freeing them from scheduling and testing duties. Without these extra duties, it may be possible for counselors to benefit students and teachers by helping them to develop positive, trusting relationships. In addition, administrators may benefit from additional professional development in the field of human resources. Administrators must be able to hire quality teachers who will act in a supporting manner for their students.

According to teachers, the team teaching approach is also a successful intervention for dealing with student bullying. Schools should promote the idea of effective team teaching, investigating what works with team teaching in their individual schools. Because resources are different for each school, it may be necessary to seek innovative methods to deal with problems like the lack of common planning time. Informational studies have been completed on the effectiveness of team teaching, and research is available for school administrators and school leadership teams to incorporate specific ideas for their individual schools.

Professional Development and Policy Development

Most of the teachers involved in the study said they had not been part of extensive professional development relating to student bullying. This fact suggests that teachers are left to fend for themselves when dealing with student bullying and that, very often, they have to rely on their own experiences or intuitions when confronted with the problem. Because of the complexities associated with student bullying, teachers should be trained periodically on how to recognize and deal with student bullying. Many districts require specific harassment training on a yearly basis. There are many professional development programs available to schools and to teachers. District and building level administrators should focus their efforts on acquiring resources to provide training for teachers who are often the adults who work most closely with students and have the most potential to impact their lives.

After the interviews had been conducted, the North Carolina legislature enacted legislation aimed at addressing professional development for teachers in the area of bullying and harassment. North Carolina legislators passed State Law 2009-212, also known as the School Violence and Prevention Act, during the summer of 2009. According to the North Carolina School Boards Association (2009) the bill has four parts, the first of which includes a definition of bullying and harassment. According to the School Violence and Prevention Act (2009) bullying and harassment are defined as:

Any pattern of gestures or written, electronic, or verbal communications, or any physical act or any threatening communication, that takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored function, or on a school bus, and that:

(1)   Places a student or school employee in actual and reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or damage to his or her property; or

(2)   Creates or is certain to create a hostile environment by substantially interfering with or impairing a student's educational performance, opportunities, or benefits. For purposes of this section, "hostile environment" means that the victim subjectively views the conduct as bullying or harassing behavior and the conduct is objectively severe or pervasive enough that a reasonable person would agree that it is bullying or harassing behavior.

Bullying or harassing behavior includes, but is not limited to, acts reasonably perceived as being motivated by any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, socioeconomic status, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, sexual orientation, or mental, physical, developmental, or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics and states that students and school employees must not be subjected to bullying; they must not be retaliated against because they have informed authorities, and that students and school employees were required to report bullying incidents. (p.2)

Part two requires schools to adopt an anti-bullying and harassment policy before December 31, 2009, and requires schools to conduct professional development for school employees before March 1, 2010. This section spells-out the requirements under the new policy, which must include a definition of bullying and harassment, the consequences for

those who are caught bullying others, a system of reporting including a way for those who report bullying to remain anonymous, and a statement of how the policy is to be disseminated to the public. Part three requires schools to promote an atmosphere free of bullying, and Part four prohibits school officials from using the new policy to restrict free speech.

In a related act, According to NCSBA (2009) North Carolina State Law 2009-551 addresses the issue of cyberbullying and makes it a crime punishable as a misdemeanor. This law makes it a crime to use any form of electronic communication to intimidate, harass, or otherwise bully another person.

Because few teachers who were interviewed were involved in the development of anti-bullying policy, the assumption is that schools are effectively missing a valuable resource for addressing the problems associated with student bullying. Schools should work to address bullying as a school-wide issue and involve teachers in the development of strategies, interventions and procedures for dealing with student bullying.

<div align="center">Suggestions for Further Research</div>

Many schools incorporate character education programs as a means to promote a more positive school climate. It would be worthwhile to study other character education or bullying prevention programs to determine their effectiveness in providing a school-wide focus on decreasing student bullying.

Due to the culture of each individual school, bullying may be different depending upon the size, culture, and level of tolerance in each particular school. Schools should conduct action research as well as student, teacher, and parent surveys to determine how bullying most often takes place in their individual schools.

More research is needed in order to gain a clearer picture of the students who are categorized as bullies. A qualitative study involving interviews with students who bully others may prove beneficial, and may reveal more information as to why they behave in this manner.

More research is needed in order to determine how students who are victimized endure being bullied. As is the case with students who bully, a qualitative study involving interviews with students who are victims may reveal better information about what these students experience and how they deal with the problems associated with bullying.

Further research is needed in order to determine how widespread racial bullying actually is. Broader studies involving a larger number of schools with racially diverse populations may reveal more problems associated with racial bullying in rural middle schools.

Further research is needed to determine how schools are dealing with the problems associated with cyberbullying. Because cyberbullying is a nationwide phenomenon, larger, more in-depth studies should be completed in order to gain a clearer sense of what works in this situation.

In the present study, the five schools studied were not only rural, but would also be considered mountain schools. Some of the complexities talked about in the teacher interviews may not be related so much to the rural environment as to the mountain environment. Further studies are needed to separate the distinctions between the two.

Further research is needed to document the frequency of bullying in rural schools, particularly in relation to small schools, compared to larger school settings. In addition,

there is a need for more research on teacher and student perceptions of bullying in rural schools.

Further research is needed on how and to what extent teachers' perceptions differ from those of their students

Additional research is needed to determine the effects of the School Violence and Prevention Act (2009) and the training which is required for school personnel. Since the law does not specifically outline training criteria, research on what kinds of training schools are offering would be of great value in determining the effectiveness of the training and whether it addresses what the law was designed to do.

Further research on the extent to which schools include teachers in the decision making process may serve to enhance the way schools develop policy, as well as the quality of the policies themselves.

Conclusion

As society continues to increase its expectations for schools, more responsibility is placed on teachers to address the problems students face. Bullying can be a traumatic and serious issue which impacts students on a daily basis. Teachers, who have the most interaction with students outside of the home, have a front-row seat when it comes to student bullying. Teachers know how students interact with one another, the problems they face, how they cope with bullying, and how students are viewed by other students, teachers, and administrators. As educational professionals who are interested in improving the lives of students in rural middle schools, it is crucial that we listen to the stories teachers tell about bullying. Their experiences and the knowledge they have

gained by being in the right place at the right time help us to better understand student

bullying and how to stop it.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter to Superintendent or School Principal

Dear Superintendent or School Principal

My name is Christiaan Ramsey and I am a doctoral student at Western Carolina University conducting a qualitative study to gain insight into teacher's experiences with student bullying in five rural middle schools. As a practicing school administrator with more than seventeen years in education, I have seen the problems victims of bullying experience. It is my hope to use the evidence gathered in this study to promote better understanding, and to provide interventions which will better address the problem of bullying in schools.

In order to select appropriate participants, I would like to work closely with the principal of the school who will initially help identify teachers who have had experience dealing with student bullying.

Once teachers have been identified, I will meet with them individually to explain the study, purpose, risks, and safeguards, and to have them sign a consent form agreeing to participate in the study. There will be no pressure to participate and teachers may discontinue participation at any time. Strict confidentiality will be maintained and the completed study will not identify participants or schools by name.

It is my sincere hope that you will agree to allow teachers from your school to participate in this study. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you,
Christiaan J. Ramsey
WCU EDD candidate and
Mars Hill Elementary School Principal

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Appendix B: Introductory Letter

April 6, 2009
Christiaan Ramsey
PO Box 1118 Marshall, NC 28753
Home phone: (828) 649-1017
Work phone: (828) 689-2922
cramsey@madison.k12.nc.us

Dear Teacher,

Teachers are on the front lines of all that happens in schools, and yet, their voices often go unheard. Among the many problems and issues teachers have to deal with in schools is student bullying. I am working on my doctoral degree, and for my dissertation, I have chosen to study teachers' experiences, perspectives and stories with student bullying in rural middle schools.

If you have had any such experiences, and would like the opportunity to share your stories in an individual interview with me, please complete the information requested below. If you have any colleagues who are not present, but may be interested, please take an extra form to give them.

The individual interviews should take 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 transcriptions of your interview to verify your responses and to see the results of the analysis.

Thank you for considering my request. Your valuable experiences may prove to be helpful in understanding the bullying experience through a teachers' eyes.

Sincerely,

Christiaan J. Ramsey, Principal
Mars Hill Elementary School

Please complete the information below, and send it to me at cramsey@madison.k12.nc.us or to the mailing address above. Or, if it is more convenient, please call me at (GIVE YOUR CELL PHONE NUMBER). Stamped envelopes are available for your convenience.

Name	
School	
Email address	
Phone	
What is the best way for me to contact you?	
What is the best time for me to contact you?	

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

My name is Christiaan Ramsey. I am a Doctoral student in education leadership at Western Carolina University.

I am conducting research to better understand teacher's experiences with student bullying in five rural middle schools. Through interviews, I hope to gain insight into the problems teachers see associated with student bullying, the strategies they see as effective in dealing with student bullying and the roles they play or may play in setting anti-bully policies.

Your involvement in this project involves answering a series of interview questions about your experiences with student bullying. If you have not had any experiences with student bullying, you should not participate in this study. The interview will take approximately one hour. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time or decline to answer any question you choose. Your responses will be held strictly confidential. The interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. After our initial interview session is completed, I will send a copy of the transcribed interview to you. You will be asked to examine your responses for clarity and inaccuracies.

If you have any questions, please discuss them with me at this time. However, if you would like to discuss this research at another time, you should contact me at (828)649-1017. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Jean Herzog at (828) 227-3327. If you have any additional questions, you can reach the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board at (828) 227-7212.

Please complete the portion of the consent form below:

□ I give my permission to the investigator to use my responses in his research.
□ I do not give my permission to the investigator to use my responses in his research.

Date: _____

Name: _____
            Print

Name: _____
            Signature

Email address: _____

Preferred Phone number: _____

Christiaan Ramsey   Faculty Advisor: Dr. Mary Jean Ronan Herzog
PO Box 1118   Professor and MAT Coordinator
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Appendix D: Interview Guide

- Think of a time when you were aware of a bullying incident and tell me about that time.

- Describe bullying here at school?

- Tell me about the bullies…About the victims

- Describe any training you have had in dealing with bullying?

- Describe your school's an anti-bullying policy?

- How are faculty members involved in creating anti-bullying policies?

- Describe your input in how bullying is handled in your school?

- What strategies have you seen work in regards to stopping bullying behavior?

- What would you recommend as far as anti-bullying interventions in your school?

- In what ways does the rural environment contribute to bullying in schools?

- How does working in a team teaching situation impact bullying in schools?

- Describe how gender impacts student bullying.

- Describe how trust between teachers and students affects bullying.

- In what ways does race affect bullying?

- Describe how your administration supports your efforts in dealing with student bullying.

- Describe how parental involvement is important in dealing with student bullying.

- How do the physiological, mental, and emotional changes middle school students go through affect student bullying?

- Describe places where most bullying occurs at school.

- In what ways, if any, do students who are victims of bullying bring it on themselves?

- In what ways is bullying overemphasized or underemphasized in rural middle schools?

- Describe your experiences with cyberbullying.