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Doctor of Social Work Banded Dissertation

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# Perception of Bullying Among Faculty Members: Implications for African American Males

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Perception of Bullying Among Faculty Members: Implications for African American Males

by

Denetria D. Brooks-James

A Banded Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Social Work

St. Catherine University | University of Saint Thomas

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### **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the various perceptions of bullying and the need for a theory that is culturally sensitive and provides the victims with a voice. Bullying adds additional stressors to the lives of its victim, due to lack of research on bullying and its impact on African American males in secondary education, this dissertation primary focus is this population. Implications for a unified definition of bullying, training that is applicable across the cultural spectrum, and the need for continued research are emphasized.

The dissertation is composed of three phenomenological products that together examined the many diverse aspects of bullying. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT), this dissertation examined its applicability to bullying. Using qualitative, exploratory methods, this dissertation aimed to gain a better understanding of some of the perceptions held by middle school faculty members as it relates to bullying. The presentation shared the findings of the study with school faculty members at a national conference. The conceptual framework of this dissertation is CRT.

The dissertation explored the premise of CRT and its effective application to bullying. The author suggests that (CRT) should be used as the theoretical foundation for understanding bullying and devising a workable plan to decrease incidents of bullying. CRT affords a holistically look at bullying through a lens that is culturally sensitive and allows the victims to have a voice.

Identifying perceptions of bullying is vital to encouraging victims to come forth with the comfort of knowing they will be understood and something will be done. Understanding how faculty members perceive bullying may aid in creating trainings that will improve their understanding of bullying, especially with African American males. To accomplish this

qualitative data was gathered through the use of one-on-one professional interviews to gain a baseline of school faculty member's perception of bullying.

The qualitative data gathered from the professional interviews were then shared with other middle school faculty members at the National Conference on Bullying in Reno, Nevada in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. The study revealed that there is a distinct difference in the way that more seasoned school faculty and younger faculty members define bullying. There also exists an interpretation difference of incidents of bullying and when male versus female middle school faculty do intervene in incidents of bullying. All respondents indicated that there is a dire need for training and a unified definition of bullying.

### **Dedication/Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for His grace and mercy and allowing me to achieve this dream that I've had since I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. He has blessed me with open doors, allowed understanding individuals to cross my path, and the strength and intelligence to get this done.

Secondly, I dedicate this dissertation to my two loving kids Mitchell J. Felix II and Shaquina P. Domingue. Thank you both for always believing in me and supporting me in everything that I set my mind to do. Being y'all's mother has been my greatest accomplishment in life. I thank God every day for blessing me with the honor of being the mother to you two beautiful creations. I love you both more than anything in and of this world.

Thirdly, I dedicate this dissertation to my two beautiful granddaughters, Armoni N. Felix and Journey R. Felix, and my grandson Kashton D. Felix (he will make his appearance in June 2018). You two both bring a brightness to my life that can never be kindled, as I know Kashton will also. Let ma-maws example lead your path to never give up and always remember that there is nothing that you can't do. I love my three angels forever and beyond.

Fourthly, I dedicate this dissertation to my three sisters Paula F. Brooks- Felix, Miranda M. Brooks-Darby and Temeaka T. Brooks-Skinner, what can I say we have always been there for each other. No matter what life has thrown our way we've made it through and I know that despite anything you three have my back, front, and sides. We are all we have and only death can separate us from each other. I am truly proud of the women you three have become. Thank y'all from the bottom of my heart for all the love, support, laughter, tears, you three have brought to my life. I love y'all to the moon and back.

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### Table of Contents

Title Page.....	1
Abstract.....	2
Dedication/Acknowledgments.....	4
Introduction.....	7
Conceptual Framework.....	8
Summary of banded Dissertation Products.....	9
Discussion.....	10
Implications for Social Work.....	11
Implications for Future Research.....	12
Comprehensive Reference List.....	14
Product 1 Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the foundational lens for Understanding and Intervening in Bullying.....	20
Product 2 Perception of Bullying among Faculty Members: Implication for African American Males .....	42
Product 3 Presentation on Perception of Bullying among Faculty Members: Implication for African American Males .....	62

Perception of Bullying Among Faculty Members: Implications for African American Males

### **Introduction**

The focus of this banded dissertation is to bring to light the challenges that are facing African American males in the secondary educational system in the U.S. The maturation period from early adolescence to late teenage years should be a time of carefreeness, fun, adventure, learning, and healthy mental and emotional growth (Goldweber, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013). The salient issues facing male African American youths are creating mental and emotional crevasses that are slowing destroying their educational path. Bullying and misdiagnosing are just two of the most important issues threatening the educational pathway of African American male youths (Schwartz & Blankenship, 2014).

Bullying is defined as aggressive, unsolicited negative behaviors that can be or has the propensity to be repeated, and that consists of a real discernment of power imbalance (stopbullying.gov website, 2016). Bullying leads to negative mental and emotional outcomes; such as depression, anxiety, and/or social withdrawal (Goldweber, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013). In addition to the emotional and mental deficits, the bullied victims are also likely to display some maladaptive behaviors; such as throwing tantrums, being verbally and/or physically aggressive, using illegal substances, disrespectful to adults, and/or they start engaging in self-injurious behaviors (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005).

The negative symptoms of bullying closely mimic the symptoms of several behavior disorders. Thus, African American males who are bullied are often labeled with bad behaviors due to the symptomology they exhibit, which leads to one or several behavior disorder diagnoses. Educators thus far, have failed to consider that the African American male may be experiencing problems. They flounder quickly to fingerprint those maladaptive behaviors as



aggressive and/or disruptive and associate the youth with a behavior disorder (Serwatka, Deering, & Grant, 1995). This misdiagnosis then places the victimized African American youth at several disadvantages. First, this places the youth at a great risk to be further victimized by others. Secondly, because he is being treated for a condition he does not have the intervention will not decrease the maladaptive behaviors, but in many cases increase them. This increase leads to the youth being kicked out of school or quitting school. According to the Schott 50 state report on public education and black males (2015), the percentage of male African Americans finishing school average was about 59% compared to the White males whose average was 80%. These numbers continue to indicate that changes in the educational system must occur, the needs and condition of each student should be considered in lei of clumping all African American males in one basket.

The banded dissertation contains three parts. The first product is a conceptual paper, on CRT and its application to bullying. The second product is a qualitative, exploratory research paper in which professional interviews were conducted to gather the perceptions of bullying by middle school faculty members. The final product was a peer-reviewed presentation at the National Conference on Bullying in Reno, Nevada. The conceptual framework for this banded dissertation is CRT.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Social dominance theory (SDT) is often used as the empirical foundation for bullying, yet by its very premise SDT perpetuates bullying. SDT postulates that in all societies that are static, there exists a predestined form of hierarchy dominance that is group-based (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). The very foundation of SDT encourages the dismissal of bullying in the African American males by associating it with normative societal behaviors. Thus, diagnosing the youth

with a behavioral disorder is seen as vicarious help to the youth. The author suggests that CRT be used as the empirical foundation for bullying instead of SDT.

Critical race theory (CRT), calls for a holistic view of bullying. The mission of CRT is to eradicate racial oppression to include all forms of oppression that is group based, by shedding light to how oppression continues to be prominent in all aspects of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT by its very premise calls for the ceasing of normalizing bullying in African American youth while asking all professionals to look beyond color and see the face of only the youth. Thus, foci will help decrease labeling and misdiagnosing.

Illuminating CRT, especially as the foundation for understanding bullying would be a more effective lens to all cultures but especial to African American culture. This is a vital conversation for the educational system and for continued social work research. The use of CRT will hopefully decrease the stereotypical thinking that encourages misdiagnosing and improper intervention methods.

### **Summary of Banded Dissertations Products**

This banded dissertation consists of three products: 1) a conceptual article discussing CRT and implementation as the empirical foundation for understanding bullying, 2) an exploratory qualitative study using professional interviews to gather the perceptions that middle school faculty members have about bullying; and 3) a peer-reviewed presentation of the study findings at the National Conference on Bullying.

#### **Product 1- Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the foundational lens for Understanding and Intervening in Bullying**

This conceptual paper identified the ethical and moral effects of CRT and how its application to bullying would be a positive, more culturally sensitive means of understanding and

intervening in bullying incidents. The paper first examined how SDT is often used as the empirical foundation for bullying, but by its very premise perpetuates school faculty members to normalize behaviors of bullying as a natural cultural interaction.

### **Product 2- Perception of Bullying among Faculty Members: Implication for African American Males**

The second product was a qualitative, exploratory study using professional interviews with middle school social workers, teachers and school counselors whom I have had the privilege of working with over the years. Through the use of purposive sampling, I chose professionals that I knew had experience in and have worked with African American males who had experienced bullying. The plan was to interview these professional and gather their stories about the African American males they have encountered who were bullied and learn from their experiences with these encounters. Utilizing professional interviews provided the ideal platform for discussing two of the exigent issues, bullying and the perception that middle school faculty members have about bullying.

### **Product 3- Presentation of the study findings**

The third product was a peer-reviewed presentation at the National Conference. A power-point presentation was presented on sharing the findings of the study conducted using the professional interviews with middle school faculty members. The presentation was conducted on March 8, 2018, at the National Conference on Bullying in Reno, Nevada.

## **Discussion**

There exists very little information in the literature regarding the perception of bullying. There also exists a huge gap in research regarding African American adolescent males and bullying. The vital information gathered from the conceptual paper and the qualitative

exploratory study adds to the limited literature that is available on the salient issues impacting adolescent African American males. Bullying can now be seen as a rising epidemic plaguing the lives of African American adolescent males. No longer should their cries for help be viewed as simply aggressive behaviors or normal African American behaviors. Bullying is a mental and emotional crippling traumatic event that hinders the growth of all its victims (Goldweber, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013). The lack of a unified definition and appropriate faculty training augments the emotional and physical damages of bullying in the lives of its victims.

Middle school faculty members had various definitions on bullying. Interesting the respondents' definitions varied by age and gender. Their willingness to intervene in incidents of bullying also varied differently among the male and female respondents. There appears to lie a huge moral and ethical dilemma between the respondents' involvement in incidents of bullying. Morally the respondents concurred that they intervene in bullying incidents that involve opposite races, and rarely intervene in same race interactions because it may be a cultural violation. This is especially true with dealing with incidents between two African American males. The dire consequences of this is multifold, African Americans are then diagnosed with aggressive intolerable behaviors and subsequently begin to lose trust in the school faculty members ability to protect them from such power-struck behavior. Which leads to truancy issues, school dropout, and possible suicide.

### **Implication for Social Work Education**

There is a lack of bullying education across the discipline genre, thus social work is not exempt for its lack of bullying education. There needs to be an educational component that addresses the need for social workers to be competent in recognizing symptoms of the bullying as there is for recognizing symptoms of grief and loss, depression and so on. A social workers

ability to recognize maladaptive behaviors will be instrumental in decreasing the misdiagnosing of numerous African American males with aggressive and social demeaning diagnosis.

Social workers need to be more involved in the policy making process as a whole but especially with bullying because of its ability to cripple its victims for a life time mentally and/or emotionally. Thus, there needs to be a push in social work education to train future social workers in the macro aspects of social work as well as the micro level. Social workers bring a holistically view point to the table and that view point sheds light on the now and the future aspects of many salient issues. It has been suggested by Slovak & Singer in 2014 that social workers aren't effective in policy making because social workers don't possess the knowledge it takes to create and implement policies. The accuracy is that social workers indeed have the knowledge needed to create and implement policies, what we do lack is a seat at the table, thus it is time that social workers take that seat and begin to create effective policies that recognize incidents of bullying and reduce its potential negative effects on its victims.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Incidents of bullying continues to rise as literature and multimedia outlets suggests, yet there is still no uniformity in the definition nor a resolution for decreasing the acts of bullying. This study revealed that there continues to be an inconsistency in the definition of bullying. Additional research is needed to uncover how these definition inconsistency's impact school faculty member's involvement in incidents of bullying. There is also a vital need for bullying research as it relates to the African American culture. There lacks sound research in this area, for example the majority of the literature that does currently exist is on the non-African American culture. The studies that do address African American's and bullying is research on this population as the bully and not the victim. The absence of research pertaining to African

Americans as victims of bullying leads to the continued isolation of this population as it relates to creating an intervention to decrease bullying among the African American population.

There also needs to be further research on why households handle bullying in the manner they do. This research captured only a snapshot of how school faculty members perceive that non-African American families and African American families deal with bullying. It would be advantageous to get a holistic view of this matter if we are to truly help decrease bullying in the lives of African American students.

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Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the foundational lens for Understanding and Intervening in  
Bullying

Denetria D. Brooks-James

Product #1

**Abstract**

School faculty member's perceptions of bullying and its effects on bullying directly related to African American middle school males has never been directly investigated. The purpose of this conceptual paper is to examine how Critical Race Theory (CRT) can be used as the underpinning theory for bullying. Helping to identify perceptions of bullying is vital to encouraging victims to come forth with the comfort of knowing they will be understood and something will be done. Identifying how faculty members perceive bullying will aid in creating trainings that will improve their understanding of bullying, especially with African American males. CRT will help find an effective avenue for decreasing and hopefully eradicating bullying.

*Keywords:* Social Dominance Theory, perception, normal behavior, bullying

### Perception of Bullying Among Faculty Members: Implications for African American Males

The primary purpose of this conceptual paper is to gain a better understanding of the varied perceptions about bullying and its impact on male African American children and adolescents. The secondary purpose is to educate school personnel about the impact of normalizing bullying and its effect on misdiagnosis. Perceptions of bullying may be directly linked to the lack of understanding of bullying particularly across cultural lines. The authors' viewpoint is that Critical Race Theory (CRT) should be utilized, especially as a foundation to understand and explain bullying and the role it plays in the lives of African American males. This is a vital conversation for the educational system, social work professionals and for continued social work research.

Especially for those who are victims of bullying, adolescence is a difficult time of growth and discovery and often a time marked with greater difficulties. Harris & Hathorn (2006) reported that bullying severely disrupts the normal healthy adolescent growth period and impedes on the positive connections that are needed to build positive bonds between the students and school faculty members. According to Evans & Smokowski (2016) bullying has taken its reign as one of the most pervasive issues attacking the mental and emotional aspects of American youth.

Despite the rising influx of anti-bullying campaigns and programs, bullying remains a common problem. Over the past decade bullying has begun to be a natural part of the life cycle of adolescent males, especially African American males. According to Ross (2003), bullying is now viewed as a stage of development that adolescents and youth will experience, but they will overcome the experience(s). The negative outcomes of bullying have implications on the victims' self-esteem, educational path, and interactions with others in their school, community

and at home (Fitzpatrick, Dulin, & Piko, 2010). If normalization of bullying endures, the victims of bullying will continue to be misdiagnosed with behavior disorders and bullying will continue to plague the lives of adolescents.

The conceptual framework chosen for this research will be the effectiveness of using CRT as the lens for understanding bullying; and the implementation of CRT when addressing and applying interventions for bullying. Social Dominance Theory (SDT) is often used as the empirical foundation for bullying, yet by its very premise, SDT perpetuates bullying. SDT postulates that in all societies that are static, there exists a predestined form of hierarchy dominance that is group-based (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The very foundation of SDT encourages the dismissal of bullying in African American males by associating it as normative societal behaviors. Thus, diagnosing the youth with a behavioral disorder is viewed as vicarious help to the youth. This conversation is essential not only to the field of social work but for the improvement of the lives that bullying impacts. Utilizing SDT creates a form of stereotypical thinking that by its very nature encourages misdiagnosing and leads to improper intervention methods.

The author suggests that CRT be used as the foundation for examining bullying. CRT, calls for a holistic view of bullying. The mission of CRT is to eradicate racial oppression to include all forms of oppression that are group based, by shedding light to how oppression continues to be prominent in all aspects of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

### **Conceptual Framework**

CRT was spawned by Critical Legal Studies (CST) and the Radical Feminism movement in the mid 1980's; Derrick Bell is accredited with being the pioneer of CRT. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The Civil Rights movement, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and Affirmative



Action were three additional influences on the development of CRT (Delgado, 1995). Two of the significant historical people to have a noteworthy impact on CRT were W.E.B. DuBois and Frantz Fanon. DuBois is accredited with the formulation of the distinction that exists between identity and policy; Fanon's radical work gave birth to the construction of racial formation (Gordon, 1999). CRT was a result of Bell and a number of his colleagues becoming cognizant of the perceived underpinnings of the civil rights movement. They believed some of the advances thought to be gained through the civil rights movement were merely stepping stones to further the "elite" whites, it was not because they had true aspirations to help the African American population (Bell, 1980). Some of the factors that impacted Bell, Delgado and Stefancic are their passions for the legal system but more importantly their desire for '*justice for all*'.

CRT purposely takes a closer look at race and racism through the lens of examining how the dominant culture continues to express racism. The major proposition of CRT is to first gain an understanding of the various types of oppression that continue to plague society while simultaneously seeking a way to eliminate it at all micro, marco and messo levels. (Ortiz & Jani 2010). CRT has numerous assumptions, some that are very explicit, and others are implicit. The explicit assumptions are that racism is common, but not to be discounted or ignored (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Another explicit assumption is that race is constructed socially. Delgado & Stefancic (2012) assert, that racism is not a biological composite of anyone, racism is socially constructed and taught. One of the major implicit assumptions of CRT is that society remains divided by racial lines where the oppressors are White Americans and the victims are African Americans (Seiler, 2003).

CRT introduced a variety of key concepts, the most unique of them will be shared.

Color imagery: Words, texts, and television images that associate skin color with traits such as innocence, criminality, or physical beauty. Counter-storytelling: Writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority. Differential racialization: Process by which racial and ethnic groups are viewed and treated differently by, mainstream society. Empathic fallacy: Mistaken belief that sweeping social reform can be accomplished through speech and protest alone (Delgado & Stefancic 2012, p. 159-162).

These concepts have brought clarity to many implicit thoughts of racism. A major tenet to CRT is the counter-storytelling, these are the personal experiences told by the person who experienced it or a narrative of their experience (Crenshaw, 2002). This gives everyone a voice; a way to heal from their perception of trauma. It can also provide clarity to the various ways a person can be victimized, which simultaneously opens a variety of ways to intervene. The core assumption that CRT makes about the person and the environment is that all people want an equal chance to learn, live and love. However, the environment around them has been shaped and manipulated by those in the supreme group making it difficult if not impossible for those in the minority group to achieve their goals. Thus, one could say; if the environment was not manipulated by those in control then those not in power could have an equal chance in life.

The use of CRT has never been applied or utilized as an empirical lens for bullying. CRT offers a critical understanding of the victimized African American youth's negative interaction in the classroom. CRT was created by lawyers as a pivotal theoretical move in the field of law, building upon the earlier critical theories and critical legal studies. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT will be used to recognize and identify distress and resiliencies in individuals who are

victims of bullying, while simultaneously developing a plan to eradicate the blinders that institutions place on the bully especially in the African American community. Another rationale for using CRT is due to the continued problem of misdiagnosing young African American males Delgado & Stefancic with negative conduct and/or behavior disorders when they are merely displaying maladaptive behaviors related to being bullied (Serwatka, Deering & Grant, 1995). Thus, CRT will be important in addressing this issue at an organization/systematic level.

CRT questions the cultural and social assumptions of being a Caucasian American and an African American and the inequalities that exist. CRT also brings about a new level of awareness across all cultural groups as it highlights the differences in bullying across cultures, and how the problem is indeed a problem for all who experience bullying (Frame & Williams 2005). The use of CRT as oppose to SDT is vital to the formulation of a real solution to eradicate bullying, especially in the lives of African American males.

### **Literature Review**

Bullying continues to plague the lives and educational path for young African American males. Unfortunately, there is very little research on this rising problem. In the review of the literature, findings from studies indicated the importance of examining the correlation between bullying and the implications for African American males. The literature used also provided insight in to bullying in schools, and how school- based programs may not be as effective as they could be in decreasing bullying activities. The literature reviewed also provides insight on the role that race plays in bullying and exposes some of the psychological outcomes that victims of bullying experience.

### **Characteristics of Bullies**

To decrease bullying we first must understand the characteristics of bullies. Dan Olweus in 2002 stated that a careful examination of the research shows that people who bully do not have self-esteem issues. In Olweus' 1978 study he alluded that there are three different types of bullies: the bully that is aggressive, the bully that is passive, and the bully-victim. He further explained that the aggressive bully is the most common type of bully. Olweus (1978), describes the aggressive bully as an impulsive, fearless, hot-tempered, non-empathetic, usually physically strong individual.

Contradictory to the thoughts of most, aggressive bullies are great at reading social cues, which they utilize to identify their prey. Olweus (1978), defines the bully who is passive as one who is a little insecure, and unlike the aggressive bullies, tends to be less popular in school and often displays negative aggressive outbursts. Olweus (1978), noted that the passive bullies usually don't initiate a bullying interaction, they wait for the aggressive bullying to initiate an event then they participate with great enthusiasm. Finally, Olweus (1978), describes the bully-victim as one who has experienced bullying first hand. They are weak when compared to their bully but are usually stronger than those they bully. The major character difference in bully-victims is that they are most likely to display symptoms of anxiety and depression. It is important to understand the face of bullying before we can effectively devise a plan to decrease and hopefully eradicate bullying.

### **Characteristics of Bullying**

The literature suggested that there are four general forms of bullying: direct bullying, verbal bullying, physical bullying and Cyberbullying. Beaty and Alexeyev (2008) define direct

bullying as behaviors that are directed to a particular victim such as teasing, hitting, taunting etc. Verbal bullying, as its name suggests, is never physical; and physical bullying is always physical in nature, but it is not just person to person violence it also includes destroying the victim's property or getting someone else to physically harm the victim (Beaty & Alexevey, 2008). Cyberbullying is very similar to verbal bullying in that it never gets physical. The major difference between Cyberbullying and verbal bullying is that Cyberbullying can happen every day, day or night, and it can quickly reach an unforeseen amount of people (Pettalia, Levin & Dickinson, 2013).

### **Victims**

To completely understand bullying we also must understand the victims of bullying, and what makes them a target for bullies. Ross (2002) indicated that victims can be categorized in two distinct ways: passive or provocative. He alludes that the major characteristics of a passive victim is having low self-esteem and being extremely emotionally sensitive. Ross (2002) stated that the characteristics of the provocative victim is that they are confident and more assertive than the passive victim. Both victim types usually blame themselves for the victimization and develop maladaptive coping skills.

### **Bullying in Schools**

Adolescents experiencing bullying is not a new phenomenon as bullying has been in schools for centuries. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) reported that approximately 22% (approximately one out of every four) students reported being bullied during the school year. The Health Behavioral in School-Aged Children (HBSC) national survey for 2005 – 2006 reported that over 34% of U.S. students in grades six through grades ten reported

bullying others in the past 30 days. Evans & Smokowski (2016) echoed this in their statement, that bullying is a rising epidemic affecting American youth and schools. According to Ross (2002), bullying has become so common in schools that the real threat that it poses to students is being overlooked. The insensitivity that exists from school staff regarding bullying is creating an issue for their students. Harris & Hathorn (2006) alluded that bullying hinders its victims from maturing in a healthy manner. Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runion (2014) in their meta-analysis of 80 studies found that over 50% of student's age 12-18 years old were victims of bullying. These numbers make it imperative that we understand the impact that bullying has on its victims and how to eradicate it.

### **School-Based Bullying Programs**

Evans, Fraser & Cotter (2014) utilized 32 studies that analyzed 24 different bullying interventions. The authors performed a systematic review and meta-analysis to find out if school-based bullying prevention programs were effective in decreasing bullying (Evans, Fraser & Cotter, 2014). The discovery of this review showed that bullying was significantly decreased in those schools that provided school-based bullying prevention programs. This research is valuable and aligns with the research interest of the author because it demonstrates that in schools where bullying was recognized and treated as a severe injustice, changes were implemented that effectively decreased bullying. Bradshaw, Sawyer & O'Brennan (2007), in their study showed evidence that the perception of bullying is vital to the resolution of bullying. The authors noted that there exists a serious difference in the way that school staff members and students perceive bullying. Due to this perception difference, it is vital that both the school staff and the students' perception be taken into account for the purpose of creating a non-bullying atmosphere for all students.

### **Race and Bullying**

Goldweber, Waasdorp & Bradshaw (2013) collected self-reporting data from middle school students totaling 10,250, for the purpose of examining the role that race plays in bullying involvement. This study “investigated patterns of bullying involvement and how they related to being African American and living in an urban setting” (2013, p. 214). This study reflects the concerns that perception of bullying is vital to the process of creating effective culturally sensitive intervention components. One could assume that because African Americans are most likely to be the victim of bullying, school staff who fail to understand or take this matter into full consideration will unintentionally label that student with a conduct disorder.

### **Reporting Bullying**

One of the major issues with decreasing the acts of bullying is directly impacted by the fact that victims of bullying are very reluctant to report bullying. Oliver & Candappa (2007) conducted a study and discovered there were numerous reasons that bullying victims did not report the bullying episodes. One reason was because they witnessed adults, specifically teachers in other situations where they did not do anything to help the victim. Oliver and Candappa (2007), substantiate this by sharing the fact that of 296 students ages 8 – 11 surveyed, only one third of them reported that a teacher did in fact respond to a bullying report. Findings further indicated that participants felt ashamed, did not want to be labeled as a tattletale, and/or feared retaliation from the bully (Oliver and Candappa, 2007). Smith & Shu (2007) in their study revealed that students who did report bullying reported it to their family members or friends rather than school faculty. This information is vital and further supports the need to educate, train and help school faculty members become aware of the role they are playing in the perpetuation of bullying.

### **Effects of Bullying**

In Lester, Cross and Shaw's 2012 longitudinal analysis found that bullies and victims of bullying reported negative emotional and mental facets consistently as compared to those that weren't involved with bullying in any capacity. In a similar study Burton, Florell and Gore (2013) reported that bullies and victims of bullying have a high risk of depression and anxiety and they are also at a high risk for displaying negative aggressive behaviors. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) in 2015 reported that students who are victims of school bullying are at a higher risk of displaying poor school performance, having difficulty with sleeping and eating habits, and display maladaptive behaviors like increased anxiety and depression. Other researchers (Gini & Pozzoli, 2013; Dake, Price, & Telljoann, 2003; Dulin, 2005) reported that any involvement in bullying increases youths' chances of displaying negative emotional, behavioral, social, and educational outcomes. The emotional defects that victims of bullying may develop alone make this a serious phenomenon needing to be understood and eliminated.

### **Psychological Symptoms of Bullying**

Ross (2002) indicated that bullying is so common in schools that it is often looked over as an experience that will occur, but eventually forgotten. Kumpulainen and Rasanen (2000) debunked Ross's statement with their epidemiological sample study, which revealed that children who experience bullying (especially if that experience is earlier in their elementary school period) display more psychological symptoms at the age of fifteen than those who weren't victimized. This corroborates the need for more research in this area and the need to bridge the gap between educators and social workers to make combating bullying a more collaborative effort.



### **Mental Health Services in Schools to help decrease Bullying**

Bains and Diallo's (2016), systematic review determined the actual effectiveness of the mental health services being delivered in school-based health centers. The review focused primarily on research studies that were published from January 1990 through March 2014. It was determined from this review that there was not enough significant evidence from their meta-analysis of the 23 research studies chosen to adequately answer their posed review question. It is important to note that the 23 research studies utilized in this meta-analysis found no congruency between the school staff and the mental health professional, which may have been the vital component needed to make these programs successful. This bears a heavy importance to understanding the perceptions of bullying even among professionals across disciplines.

### **After-School Based Bullying Programs**

Maynard, Kremer, Polanin, Vaughn and Sartesch (2015), performed a systematic review with the purpose of answering two clear questions regarding the effectiveness of after-school programs primarily serving at-risk students within 2 specific areas; school attendance and externalizing behaviors. They also had a question directly related to the actual characteristics or design of after-school programs. The authors for this review used a total of 24 published and unpublished studies. Their finding revealed that after-school programs have been shown to have no significant effects on externalized behaviors or school attendance. Thus, the characteristics of after-school programs need to be reevaluated and revised if they are truly to be effective. This study echoes the urgency in understanding the underlying factors of bullying, in order to put in place an effective plan to eradicate bullying.

**Misdiagnosis/Overdiagnosis**

Misdiagnosis and/or over diagnosis of conduct disorders is one of the crippling effects of school faculty members' failure to understand bullying and the negative effects it has on the lives of African American youth. Serwatka and Deering (1995) alluded in their study that school faculty members most often ascribe negative classroom behaviors such as inattentiveness and restlessness in male African American youths as aggressive, disruptive behaviors associated with a conduct disorder. Spence and Oatts (1999) echoed this stating that African American males who are suffering from other emotional issues are quickly labeled with a conduct disorder without a full exploration of what is really going on with the youth. Understanding that male African American youths may also struggle with negative emotional and mental well-being associated with bullying is a pressing issue that needs to be addressed.

The literature reviewed reinforced the need for a clearer understanding of what bullying is and indicated that there is a disturbing difference in race and bullying. One can conclude that school-based bullying programs are not as effective as they can be because of the lack of understanding that exists about bullies, their victims and the act of bullying by the creators of these programs. If school faculty members continue to ignore the psychological effects of bullying on its victims, the misdiagnosing and/or over diagnosing of young African American males with behavior and conduct disorders will continue to rise. The author will highlight more details of the reviewed literature in the discussion session.

**Discussion**

Bullying is defined as aggressive, unsolicited negative behaviors that can be or has the propensity to be repeated, and is a real discernment of power imbalance, according to the

stopbullying.gov website (Anonymous, n.d.). Bullying may lead to negative mental and emotional outcomes; such as depression, anxiety, and/or social withdrawal (Goldweber, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013). In addition to the emotional and mental deficits, the bullied victims are also likely to display some maladaptive behaviors; such as throwing tantrums, being verbally and/or physically aggressive, using illegal substances, disrespecting adults, and/or engaging in self-injurious behaviors (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005).

Goldwater, Waasdorp and Bradshaw (2012), reported in their study that African American male youths have a higher prevalence of being bullied than those in other racial groups. The negative symptoms of bullying closely mimic the symptoms of several behavior disorders, thus young African American males are often labeled as bad, aggressive students due to the symptomology they exhibit, which leads to one or several behavior disorder diagnoses (Clark, 2007). Educators may refuse to consider that young African American males may be experiencing problems, they flounder quickly to fingerprint those maladaptive behaviors as aggressive and/or disruptive and associate the person with a behavior disorder (Serwatka, Deering, & Grant, 1995). This misdiagnosis then places African American youths at several disadvantages. First, this places the youths at a greater risk to be further victimized by others. Secondly, because he is being treated for a condition he does not have the intervention will not decrease the maladaptive behaviors, but in many cases, increase them. This increase may lead to the youth being kicked out of school or quitting school. According to the Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males (2015), the percentage of African American males finishing school average was about 59% compared to the white males whose average was 80%. The numbers continue to indicate that changes in educational system must occur, the needs and

condition of each student should be considered in lieu of clumping all African American males in one basket.

The primary focus is placed on African American male youth due to the lack of research evaluating bullying and its effects on this population, which leads to the misdiagnosing and/or over diagnosing on conduct disorders in this population.

The author attributes the perpetuation of bullying to the fact that the theory most often used to understand bullying may by its very premise perpetuating bullying. SDT stands on the premise that people in general desire the need to establish group dominance (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Bullying especially among young, male African Americans is viewed as a natural part of socialization. School faculty members can easily turn a blind eye to acts of bullying, labeling it as normal dominance establishing behavior. It is this normalcy formation of thinking that allows school faculty members to overlook the destructive, hurtful, malicious acts of bullying, and its harmful effects on the life of its victim(s) (Salmon & West, 1994). The manifestation of bullying in the African American population can be masked through the lens of SDT. SDT postulates that group social hierarchies are developed through avenues of discrimination, oppression and numerous other injustices (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

CRT should instead be used as the lens for exploring, understanding and eventually eradicating bullying. CRT promotes the accountability of each individual and each situation, instead of grouping cultures together and making assumptions about the whole group based on a few members (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Utilizing CRT to deconstruct the race-related ideology as it relates to bullying would be beneficial for all racial groups especially African Americans. Understanding that bullying is not simply a part of the African American male

growth process, but hinders the mental, emotional and educational growth of African American male victims.

### **Implementations for Social Work**

In general, there is a large gap in the knowledge available about African Americans particularly male youth and bullying. Fitzpatrick, Dulin and Piko (2009), indicated that bullying and the negative effects it has on African Americans in general is significantly understudied, because most the research that exists is primarily about white, middle-class youth. This opens a large research door for the field of social work. The major strength of using CRT in this manner is the fact that it is innovative, and it will be ground breaking for the field of social work. It will provide a pathway for more work in this area while creating a bridge for interventions for this vulnerable population.

### **Limitation**

One limitation this conceptual research paper lies within its strength in the fact that CRT has never been applied to bullying thus there exist no empirical studies to solidify this claim. As the field of social work has evolved to a more evidence based for practice, this again may give rise to numerous skeptics.

### **Conclusion**

Bullying continues to plague young African American males and their educational paths. The lack of research in this area makes it a vital research platform. Understanding the different perceptions of bullying that exist will be instrumental in developing programs that will be effective in decreasing and hopefully eradicating bullying.

The presences of bullying in the elementary and middle school system continues to increase in numbers. Canter (2005) alluded that approximately 70% of students reported that they experienced bullying. This finding alone substantiates that school faculty members missed the mark somewhere and instead of decreasing bullying they have aided in its increase. The negative effects of bullying alone warrant a deeper look into the topic. Burton, Florell and Gore's (2013) study indicated that youth who are victims of bullying have a harder time adapting in school, have lower self-esteem issues than non-victims, and become increasingly withdrawn as the bullying increases.

It is time that we discover and understand bullying in order for us to find a true solution for the rising issues affecting our youth especially African American males. It is also imperative for the field of social work to gain a new reputation for innovative research. The use of CRT among practitioners and educators will likely enhance their understanding of the African American male bully. This new understanding will allow practitioners and educators the ability to develop an intervention that is effective and culturally sensitive.

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Perceptions among Faculty Members of Adolescent Bullying: Implications for African American

Males

Denetria D. Brooks-James

Product #2

Perceptions among Faculty Members of Adolescent Bullying: Implications on African American  
Males

Adolescence, for most, is a difficult time of growth and discovery. For adolescents who are victims of bullying this time of growth and development are marked with greater difficulties. Harris & Hathorn (2006) reported that adolescents who are bullied experience other adverse complications that worsen their chances of experiencing healthy growth and development. Evans & Smokowski (2016) concluded that bullying is one the most pressing issues affecting African American males because its adverse effects permeate through every aspect that the African American male's life. In recent years, there has been an influx of bullying campaigns and programs, yet nothing appears to be slowing the bullying avalanche down.

Over the past decade, bullying has begun to take its reign as a natural part of the life cycle of adolescent males, especially African American males. According to Ross (2003), bullying is now viewed as a stage of development that adolescents and youths will experience, but they will overcome the experience(s). Research contradicts Ross's statement and has demonstrated that bullying is an old problem with many new faces (cyberbullying, employment bullying, etc.); rendering it necessary for continued research because it is continuing to have a negative effect on the lives and educational path of our youth, more particularly African American males (Fitzpatrick, Dulin, & Piko, 2010).

According to stopbullying.gov website, bullying is defined as aggressive, unsolicited negative behaviors that can be or has the propensity to be repeated, and that consists of a real discernment of power imbalance (Anonymous, n.d.). One goal of this research is to identify how middle school faculty members perceive bullying. Another goal is to help school personnel, and parents first recognize bullying as a serious and often traumatic event(s) and to facilitate an

understanding of how normalizing bullying only perpetuates it and leads to the misdiagnosing of its victims.

Bullying may lead to adverse mental and emotional outcomes; such as depression, anxiety, and/or social withdrawal (Goldweber, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013). In addition to the emotional and mental deficits, the bullied victims are also likely to display some maladaptive behaviors; such as throwing tantrums, being verbally and/or physically aggressive, using illegal substances, disrespectful to adults, and/or they start engaging in self-injurious behaviors (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005).

This research presents a qualitative study using purposive sampling exploring how middle school faculty members perceive bully and how that perception impacts bullying particularly with African American males from the perspectives of the middle school faculty members. The author strategically selected professionals who have experience in working with adolescent African American males. Utilizing professional interviews provided the ideal platform to discussing two exigent issues, bullying perceptions of the faculty member and the misdiagnosing of African American males, particularly in the primary educational system, grades 5<sup>th</sup> -n 8<sup>th</sup>. The primary goal of these interviews was to answer the question of how is bullying perceived by the middle school faculty members interviewed, while illuminating how their perception may lead to the misdiagnosis of the African American youth. The second purpose of these professional interviews is to suggest a possible resolution to these damaging problems.

### **Literature Review**

Bullying continues to plague the lives and educational path of male African American youth. Unfortunately, there is very little research done on this continued rising problem. The studies that were used to review do not directly deal with the research purpose, but serve as an excellent foundation for the research and proposed study.

#### **Bullying in Schools**

Bullying by no means is a new issue; bullying has been around in school for centuries. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) reported that approximately 22% (one out of every 4) students reported being bullied during the school year. The Health Behavioral in School-Aged Children (HBSC) national survey for 2005 – 2006 reported that over 34% of U.S. students in grades 6<sup>th</sup> through grades 10<sup>th</sup> reported bullying others in the past with the past 30 days. Evans & Smokowski (2016) echoed this in their statement, "bullying is one of the most pervasive issues affecting American youth and schools" (p. 365). According to Ross (2002), bullying is now so common in schools that the real threat that it poses to students is being overlooked. The insensitivity that exists from school staff regarding bullying is creating an issue for their students. Harris & Hathorn alluded that "the presence of bullying at school often creates a barrier for young people to develop into well-adjusted adults" (p. 50). Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runion (2014) in their meta-analysis of 80 studies found that over 50% of students age 12-18 years old were victims of bullying.

#### **School-Based Bullying Programs**

Evans, Fraser & Cotter (2014) utilizing 32 studies that analyzed 24 different bullying interventions. The authors performed a systematic review and meta-analysis to find out if school-based bullying prevention programs were effective in decreasing bullying. A primary conclusion

of this study showed that bullying was significantly decreased in those schools that provided school-based bullying prevention programs. This research is valuable and aligns with the research interest of the writer because it demonstrates that in schools where bullying was recognized and treated as a severe injustice, changes were implemented that were effective to decrease bullying. Bradshaw, Sawyer & O'Brennan (2007), in their study, showed evidence that the perception of bullying is vital to the resolution of bullying. They noted that there is a serious difference in the way that school staff members and students perceive bullying. Due to this huge perception difference, it is vital that both the school staff and the students' perception of bullying be taken into account for the purpose of creating a prevention program that will have a positive impact on bullying.

### **Race and Bullying**

Goldweber, Waasdorp & Bradshaw (2013) collected self-reporting data from middle schools totaling 10,250, for the purpose of examining the role that race plays in bullying involvement. Particularly this study "investigated patterns of bullying involvement and how they related to being African American and living in an urban setting" (2013, p. 214). This is consistent with their hypothesis that African Americans are more likely to be victims of bullying. This study reflects the concerns that perception of bullying is vital to the process of creating effective culturally sensitive intervention components. One could assume that an African American is most likely to be the victim of bullying, school staff who fail to understand or take this matter into full consideration will unintentionally diagnose that student with a conduct disorder.

## **Effects of Bullying**

In Lester, Cross, & Shaw's 2012 longitudinal analysis found that bullies and victims of bullying reported negative emotional and mental facets consistently as compared to those that weren't involved with bullying in any capacity. In a similar study Burton, Florell & Gore (2013) report that bullies and victims of bullying are had a high risk of depression and anxiety, and they are also at a high risk for displaying negative, aggressive behaviors. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in 2015, reported that students who are victims of school bullying at a higher risk of displaying poor school performance, having difficulty with sleeping and eating habits and display maladaptive behaviors like increased anxiety and depression. Other researchers (Gini & Pozzoli, 2013; Dake, Price, & Telljoann, 2003; Dulin, 2005) all reported that any involvement in bullying increases that youths' chances of displaying negative emotional, behavioral, social, and educational outcomes.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

A qualitative exploratory study design was the approach utilized for this study because it has proven itself to be the most effective and practical way of collecting and analyzing qualitative data (Creswell & Plano, 2011). The qualitative data were gathered through the use of ten professional interviews. Eight were conducted face to face and two were conducted via an electronic face to face interview.

### **Target Population & Sample**

The target populations for the qualitative data were 10-middle school faculty members whom all have experience of working with African American males in the target age group of 10-years old to 13-years old. Because the researcher was focused on professionals who possessed



specific experiences and first-hand knowledge of African American males who had dealt with bullying in the stated age range, the sampling technique utilized was purposive sampling. It is noted with this sampling technique style that the sample size will not represent that actual population. As stated by Yin (2014), the primary goal of the purposive sampling technique is to focus on the characteristic of the chosen sample population that is specific to answer the established research question(s). According to Palinkas et al. (2015), purposive sampling techniques are used mainly in qualitative research, the sample size is relatively small compared to other sampling sizes due to the nonrandomization of the sample.

### **Measurement**

**Qualitative Measures.** The qualitative data were obtained through interviews with professionals. The hour to hour and a half interviews were single interviews with 10 different professionals. The interviews were conducted using open-ended questions developed by the researcher (see appendix A). These interviews were conducted to collect information about the professional perception(s) of bullying and their first-hand experience with the target population, in order to collect cultural specific data. The questions for the interviews were created based on the information that the author found in the literature and several pilot interviews were conducted to help format and structure the interview questions. These types of interviews are vital for seeking answers to questions like; “How do you define bullying, when do you intervene and do you see a difference in bullying across ethnic lines?”

### **Procedures**

**Qualitative Data.** The qualitative data were collected through one on one interviews with professionals who have experience in working with youths in school settings and bullying.

The interviews were a single-one-hour to an hour-and a half long. The location were all neutral locations selected by the interviewee, but off the premises of the interviewee's school or agency.

### **Human Subjects Protection**

**A human participant is defined** as "a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains data through intervention or interaction with the individual or obtains identifiable private information." (Education.gov website). Because this research study requires human subjects to get the needed information, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained through St. Catherine and The University of St. Thomas IRB. The researcher addressed confidentiality, any possible risks, and the fact that there were no monetary or other associated benefits from participating in this research. The participants were reminded that their participation is voluntary, and they were provided information on how they can receive a copy of the study after it is completed. In order to protect the privacy of all human subject interviewees, no specific identifying information was obtained such as social security numbers, date of births, physical address, names or school identification numbers.

### **Data Analysis**

The qualitative data were first analyzed to establish any consistent themes and or patterns. Then researcher created three major categories based on the themes that developed through the initial data analysis (Cresswell & Plano, 2011). An excel spread sheet was utilized to capture to data. The themes were color coded using purple, green and blue. The definitions were all keep in quotes, to capture the interviewee actual words. The intervention information and their perception of bullying across ethnicity were divided into three racial subcategories Caucasian, African American and other.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

There are several strengths in utilizing a qualitative exploratory research design, on it can improve the writer's understanding about middle school faculty member's perception of bullying. Utilizing a qualitative exploratory research design can also assist in creating a workable solution for decreasing bullying. As alluded by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), this design may give way to the writer discovering some contradictions in the data collected, which may prove opposition to the research agenda.

### **Results**

The researcher coded and organized the data collected from the middle school faculty member interviews according to overarching themes. Three major themes arose from these interviews: the faculty member's definition of bullying, the faculty members' intervention in bullying incidents and their perception of bullying across racial and ethnic lines.

### **Bullying Definition**

The definition of what constitutes a bully varied a great deal between the ten research participants. A first surprise was that in a contemporary context, bullying, to some of the respondents, was still no more than someone getting their lunch money taken. One respondent indicated that bullying is "someone taking a child's lunch money, or school supplies on a daily or weekly basis." Another respondent reported that to her bullying is "usually bigger kids being mean to usually smaller and younger kids." Another surprise came in the form of the more functional definitions of bullying coming from younger, less seasoned middle school faculty members, and the older, more seasoned middle school faculty members seemed to have an older definition for bullying. Though the respondents' definitions of bullying didn't necessarily converge, collectively their definitions concurred in the fact that bullying was framed as and

understood to be a negative act that could potentially have a negative effect on the victims academically. Respondents used terms like “lasting negative educational impact and academic unsuccessfulness.” What wasn’t mentioned by any of the respondents was the emotional impacts of bullying, which was very surprising.

### **Bullying Intervention**

The second major category addressed in these interviews was: when and how do the faculty members intervene in incidents they would label as bullying. Differences in responses among interviewees tended to vary by gender. The female participants responded to more physical engagement that they deemed was “unusually roughness”, and the males responded to language that they perceived as “aggressive and derogatory”. Those respondents who responded to more physical engagement used language such as, “more than the typical pushing and shoving” or “nonverbal indicators like fists balled up and/or the Caucasian male being red in the face.” Respondents indicated those factors caused them to navigate towards that area, with hopes that their presences alone would rectify the situation. The respondent also reported that they would get the schools resource office (SRO), who is usually a city certified police officer, who is assigned to that particular school. The male respondents indicated that they usually responded to aggressive and derogatory verbal cues, because for them this was a huge red flag, indicating that things have escalated beyond “typical horse playing.”

It also stood out to the interviewer that interviewees reported intervening in interactions primarily between a Caucasian and an African American male. None of the participants reported an actual engagement with two males of the same race. Respondents almost collectively indicated that the racial tension and sensitivity that exists made them more sensitive to “white on black” negative engagement that same ethnicity interaction. A respondent indicated, “I found it

common to see African Americans hand playing or boxing in a fun manner, that I personal always looked past an incident that for me appeared not to be overly aggressive.” Another respondent indicated, “It’s sad to say, but it is almost like second nature to intervene in incidents between different races than it is for same race incidents, whether the races is Caucasian, African American, Hispanic etc..”

Those who understood bullying to include verbal interaction, interacted in incidents in which the verbal exchange got loud and extremely aggressive, demonstrated by the use of inappropriate words and verbal threats. The respondents indicated that they felt that their intervention was needed to avoid the incident escalating into physical violence. Likewise, these respondents indicated that they only responded to incidents of different race involvement. Further exploration in this matter revealed that the respondents felt that same race verbal interactions were often seen as a form of cultural norm and needed no intervention even when the altercation became slightly aggressive. One respondent noted that usually a fellow student intervened and the situation deescalated.

### **Perception of Bullying across Racial and Ethnic Lines**

All participants concurred that there is a grave difference in the way that bullying is perceived in Caucasian and African Americans homes, which they feel contributes to the way teachers react to bullying at school. Several of the participants indicated that students who are African American can’t necessarily go home and discuss bullying incidents with their parents because they would be seen as weak or cowardly. Two of the interviewees are African Americans and they made references to the fact that African American parents and more particularly mothers, are quick to make comments like “if you let someone beat you at school, I am gonna beat you when you get home” or “you don’t run from nobody.” The respondents

expressed that these incidents impacted the way they intervened in bullying especially with African American students, because they felt that “their intervention would do more harm than good or would create a level of distrust between the faculty member and the student.” One respondent indicated, “Sometimes we are the only ally a student may have.” Another respondent indicated, “A public intervention could cause a negative ripple effect that could increase bullying.” The respondent explained that the bully could utilize the intervention as a sign of weakness from the victim and cause more acts of bullying.

Others indicated that part of African Americans’ survival tool or strategy is to be and present as fearless and strong, thus discussing bullying in their home goes against their survival system. Several of the interviewees referred to incidents in which they suspected a child was being bullied, and tried to discuss it with the students and the student’s first response was, “please don’t tell my mom she won’t understand or I will get in trouble at home for allowing this to happen.” Interviewees reflected on incidents in which they wanted to help but felt like helping would do more harm to the student.

There again was a difference in the way the male interviewees and the female interviewees perceived the perception of bullying across ethnic lines. The males perceived the mother’s defensive tactics as a skill building making comments like, “making a man out of him, and trying to fulfill the father role.” The female interviewees used words like “protection, survival skills and generational traditions”.

### **Training**

Three of the ten respondents indicated that they did attend a workshop on bullying, however that workshop was at an educational conference that they attended and it was their personal choice to attend not a mandate from their perspective schools. All respondents did

indicate that in the fall portion of the school year there is an anti-bullying awareness program in which they wear ribbons. All ten respondents indicated that they felt as though they needed training on bullying, they used phrases like: “I don’t possess adequate knowledge of bullying” or “the little information I do know isn’t enough”. Interestingly all respondents alluded that their lack of training does attribute that to their inability to “effectively intervene in incidents of bullying.” One respondent indicated, “Embarrassing to say, but I would be very embarrassed if I admonish someone for bullying and it wasn’t, I would be seen as inadequate.”

### **Discussion**

The major purpose of this research was to gain knowledge about middle school faculty member’s perception about bully and the implications of their perception to their level of intervention into incidents of bullying, particularly as it pertains to African America males. The ten professional interviews illuminated four major themes that all contribute to the significant difference in the perception of bullying among middle school faculty members. More significantly, is how those perception differences impact the faculty members’ involvement in bullying intervention efforts, especially when those incidents involve African American males.

The definition of bullying varied tremendously between the respondents. Respondents attributed certain behaviors to bullying, like “taking lunch money” or “being mean”; in other words each respondents definition was based on their personal conception of bullying, thus leading to their misconception of what bullying really is. Faculty members’ inability to recognize bullying incidents is directly tied to their lack of proficiency in understanding what bullying really is (Swaerer et al., 2009).

Intervening in bullying incidents were directly connected to the middle school faculty members’ perception of what they defined bullying as. Admittedly, not all bullying incidents fit

into a black or white box, there are numerous shades of grey. However, there are distinguishing characteristics of bullying that are relatively the same (Anderson, 2011). The occurrence of bullying is often present when a person, (the bully) purposively and consciously exhibits verbal and/or physical behaviors towards another person (the victim), where an obvious power differentiation is present (Compton et al., 2014). The respondents' intervention prerequisites overlooked the overt acts of bullying and in most cases did not even consider the covert bullying behaviors.

The respondents' perception of bullying across ethnic lines concurred. Their perception that bullying is perceived differently in most African American homes versus the way it is perceived in the homes of their Caucasian counterparts is relative to the differences that do exist. As an African American I have witness first-hand the way African American parents, particularly mothers react to their son and/or daughter coming home in tears because someone said and did something mean to them. I have seen first-hand children get spanked because they allowed someone to take something from them and/or didn't defend themselves when someone bigger than them pushed them around or beat them up. Kitts, (2003) inferred that pluralistic ignorance may be the cause of this generational frame of thought for African American families. Pluralistic ignorance is defined as members belonging to the same group rejecting a norm internally, but externally accepting it because they feel that the majority of the group accepts things as they are. In other words, most African Americans are against bullying but it appears that African Americans as a whole utilize bullying as a tool to turn boys to men, and/or they see this as a way to prepare their kids for the tough road ahead of them.

Bullying training among the respondents is not existent. The few who chose to participate in bullying training received abrasive training that didn't not adequately prepare them



to intervene in incidents of bullying. Eva et al., (2012) reported that most professionals don't intervene in bullying incidents because they feel they don't possess the needed knowledge to interpret what is or is not bullying, which lead to feelings of incompetency in the area of bullying.

### **Implications for School Settings**

Training for all school faculty members needs to occur. One concurrent definition of bullying needs to be put in place. Good et al., 2001 study indicated that school faculty members who have successfully completed a detailed, intense training on bully, increased their intervention efforts and increased their reports on acts of bullying. This training must also contain cultural sensitive information, to adequately equip faculty members' to intervene in bullying matters across ethnic lines. Faculty members' involvement and response to bullying are vital to reducing the acts of bullying and improving the mental, emotional and educational lives of bullying victims (Anderson, 2011). Parental training must also be incorporated in an effort to increase parents' awareness to the legitimacy of bullying and the possible negative effects it can have on their child/children mentally, emotionally and educationally.

Finally implementing school anti-bullying programs would be advantageous for the student's awareness but community awareness as a whole. Data suggests that accredited anti-bullying programs are effective in increasing knowledge about bullying and decreasing acts of bullying when coupled with faculty member training (Limbos et al., 2007).

### **Future Research**

The present study just touches the surface of the stringent issues facing African American males in the academic setting. It is imperative that further research be done in order to create an evidence-based treatment regimen for this vulnerable population. Future research is vital to truly

understand where the deficits lie in decreasing bullying involvement for African American males. Currently the majority of the studies done on bullying is centered around Caucasian Americans, thus the interventions aren't culturally sensitive and renders itself ineffective in the lives of African American males.

### **Conclusion**

The research findings revealed that there exists vital difference in the way that middle school faculty members perceive and intervene in incidents of bullying. The respondents had various definitions of bullying, and prerequisite behaviors that they felt constitutes a bullying incident. This research also revealed that middle school faculty members have a perception of the differences that exist in the way that Caucasians families and African American families deal with incidents of bullying, thus their lack of intervening in bullying that occurs between two African American males is perceived as a form of support and respect for that African American family autonomy.

There continues to be a huge void in the literature of research dealing particularly with African American males and bullying. More in-depth research in this area could lead to a better understanding of bullying in this venerable population and more importantly lead to a decrease in the negative emotional, mental and educational outcomes associated with bullying.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions:

1. What is/was your role at the school?
2. How long have been in this field?
3. How long have you been at your school/agency?
4. Describe your rapport with your students? with their parent(s) and/or guardians.
5. How would you describe the African American population at the school?
6. What is your definition of bullying?
7. What behaviors do you perceive as bullying behaviors?
8. What differences have you observed in bullying across ethnicities (if any)?
9. Do you feel that there is a difference in the way bullying is handled in African American and Caucasian homes?
10. Do you feel your students would come to you to report bullying? Why or Why not?
11. Describe how you respond to bullying.
12. Do you find that you handle bullying differently across gender, ethnicity and/or culture?
13. In what kind of instances do you report bullying and describe that process?
14. What incidents do you regard as a “normal” part of growing up (these incidents may resemble bullying)?
15. Without using any names or identifiers, please share with me an incident of bullying that you’ve been involved with and how it was handled? Were there aspects you wished would have unfolded differently?
16. Have there ever been instances where you believe that overlooking a bullying incident (or pattern) made sense? Please give me an example.
17. Has there ever been a time where you purposely overlooked bullying? Why?
18. Have you had any training on bullying? What did that training consist of? To what extent do you think this training was adequate?
19. What does your agency/school do now to combat bullying?
20. What do you feel your agency/school should do to combat bullying?

21. Is there any other information you would like to share with me about bullying?

Perceptions among Faculty Members of Adolescent Bullying: Implications for African American

Males

Denetria D. Brooks-James

Product # 3

Perceptions among Faculty Members of Adolescent Bullying: Implication on African American  
Males

**Abstract**

Bullying continues to plague the lives and educational path of male African American adolescent. Unfortunately, there is very little research done on this continued rising problem. To explore the impact that the perception of bullying has on intervening in incidents of bullying, an exploratory, qualitative study was done using professional interviews. The focus of the presentation was to share the valuable information obtained from that study. This presentation was presented at the National Conference on Bullying in Reno, Nevada on March 8, 2018.



## Perceptions among Faculty Members of Adolescent bullying: Implication for African American males

Denetria Brooks-James, MSW, LMSW

### Bullying- What's the BIG deal

- ▶ Approximately 22% (one out of every 4) students reported being bullied during the school year. (The National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015).
- ▶ “Bullying is one of the most pervasive issues affecting American youth and schools” (Evans & Smokowski, 2016, p. 365).
- ▶ Bullying is now so common in schools that the real threat that it poses to students is being overlooked (Ross, 2002).
- ▶ 160,000 kids skip school daily to avoid their bully (Americaspcc.org).
- ▶ Suicide is the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death in students ages 10-14 years old (CDC.gov).
- ▶ The 1990's school shooting cases- 12 of the 15 of the shooters had a history of being bullied (stopbullying.org).

## The BIG deal is.....

- ▶ We are losing our kids, mentally, emotionally, and physically and that **MUST**



## The Target Population

- ▶ 24.7% of African-American students, 17.2% of Hispanic students, and 9% of Asian students report being bullied at school (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015).
- ▶ Race-related bullying is significantly associated with negative emotional and physical health effects (Rosenthal et al, 2013).
- ▶ African American males have a higher prevalence of being victims of bullying (Goldweber, Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2013).
- ▶ African American males are less likely to report that they are a victim of bullying than their Caucasian counterparts (Sawyer, Bradshaw, & O'Brennan, 2007).
- ▶ African American males are misdiagnosed with conduct disorders and aggressive tendencies, dismissing maladaptive behaviors related to being a victim of bullying (Serwatka, Deering, & Grant, 1995).

## My Research

- ▶ IBR approved (St. Catherine and the University of St. Thomas)
- ▶ Qualitative data
- ▶ Purposive sampling
- ▶ Face-to-face professional interviews
- ▶ Research Goal:
  - ▶ Understand middle school faculty members perception of bullying
  - ▶ How that perception effects how they intervene in bullying incidents
  - ▶ What are the implications? Training, educational pathways, and psychological well-being

## Interview Questions:

- ▶ 1. What is/was your role at the school?
- ▶ 2. How long have been in this field?
- ▶ 3. How long have you been at your school/agency?
- ▶ 4. Describe your rapport with your students? with their parent(s) and/or guardians.
- ▶ 5. How would you describe the African American population at the school?
- ▶ 6. What is your definition of bullying?
- ▶ 7. What behaviors do you perceive as bullying behaviors?
- ▶ 8. What differences have you observed in bullying across ethnicities (if any)?
- ▶ 9. Do you feel that there is a difference in the way bullying is handled in African American and Caucasian homes?
- ▶ 10. Do you feel your students would come to you to report bullying? Why or Why not?
- ▶ 11. Describe how you respond to bullying.
- ▶ 12. Do you find that you handle bullying differently across gender, ethnicity and/or culture?
- ▶ 13. In what kind of instances do you report bullying and describe that process?
- ▶ 14. What incidents do you regard as a "normal" part of growing up (these incidents may resemble bullying)?
- ▶ 15. Without using any names or identifiers, please share with me an incident of bullying that you've been involved with and how it was handled? Were there aspects you wished would have unfolded differently?
- ▶ 16. Have there ever been instances where you believe that overlooking a bullying incident (or pattern) made sense? Please give me an example.
- ▶ 17. Has there ever been a time where you purposely overlooked bullying? Why?
- ▶ 18. Have you had any training on bullying? What did that training consist of? To what extent do you think this training was adequate?
- ▶ 19. What does your agency/school do now to combat bullying?
- ▶ 20. What do you feel your agency/school should do to combat bullying?
- ▶ 21. Is there any other information you would like to share with me about bullying?

## Interesting Resource findings!



## Definition of bullying (interviewee's)

- ▶ "Someone taking a child lunch money, or school supplies on a daily or weekly basis".
- ▶ "Usually bigger kids being mean to usually smaller and younger kids".
- ▶ "Any person who hits, teases, intimidates anyone else".
- ▶ "Any child who takes advantage of another child to make him/herself feel superior".
- ▶ "Name calling, teasing, taking their lunch money, picking on them because they have some type of disability".
- ▶ "Bullying is the act of intimidation by individuals or groups, that can be violent and oppressive".

## Bullying Intervention

- ▶ Primary intervention was between Caucasian and African Americans
  - ▶ Racial tension and sensitivity
- ▶ Female faculty members vs. male faculty members
  - ▶ “Unusually roughness”
  - ▶ Language that was perceived as “aggressive and derogatory”



## Perceived perception of how bullying is handled at home (African Americans, Caucasian)

- ▶ 9 of the 10 indicated that they felt that there was a huge difference in the way that African Americans households handled bullying versus the way that Caucasian households handled bullying.
  - ▶ Seen as weak or cowardly
  - ▶ Intervention would do more harm than good
  - ▶ Survival tool or strategy
  - ▶ Mother's defensive tactics
  - ▶ Skill building

## Recommendations

- ▶ Training for ALL
  - ▶ Education on what bullying is (universal definition)
  - ▶ Uniformed intervention for all
  - ▶ Parental awareness of the legitimacy of bullying and it's negative effects on their child mentally, emotionally and educationally.
- ▶ Implementing bullying programs that are culturally sensitive

## Questions & Comments





## The End



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