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Darcy Bowman

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The Sociology of Bullying: Prevention and Intervention Using a Three Themed Model

By

Darcy Bowman

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Abstract

Darcy Bowman: The Sociology of Bullying: Prevention and Intervention Using a Three Themed Model

Advisor: Ilene Kaplan

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of a bullying intervention model that involves visibility, intervention and support for vulnerable populations. Vulnerable populations are considered to be LGBT youth, gender non-conforming youth, and racial/religious minorities. Research showed that factors in effective bullying intervention programs fell into the themes of visibility, support, and intervention for vulnerable populations. Guidance Counselors at three public schools in the New York State capital region answered questionnaires about how their school's bullying intervention program incorporated the identified themes. The results indicated that schools which programs incorporated high levels of visibility, support, and intervention for vulnerable populations had lower rates of bullying than schools that did not.

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Chapter 1: Literature Review: Sociology of Bullying

Bullying and Prevalence Rates

Bullying has always been a problem in schools, but the ways in which people bully change depending on the cultural context of the time. While some school yard bullying remains very similar to how it has always been, new technology has created new ways for people to bully one another. In order to understand what is bullying and how it is experienced today it is important to clarify what is meant by the word bullying, and to see the statistics of who is being bullied and in what ways.

Bullying Defined

For the purpose of my thesis, I will be using Meyer's (2009) definition of bullying as "repeatedly and over time intentionally inflicting injury on another person." (Meyer 2009: 2). This can be verbally (through things like threatening, name calling), physically (punching, kicking etc.), or psychologically (excluding others, manipulating others etc.) (Meyer 2009). Meyer's (2009) definition of bullying is useful because it differentiates the different types of injury that can occur to another person through bullying.

Physical bullying may be the most easily recognized bullying with verbal bullying coming in second but it is important to understand how individuals may be being bullied psychologically. Actions like excluding others are often subtle and go under the radar of school officials, but they can have devastating consequences to the victim, so it is important to include this in the definition of bullying.

Cyber bullying is a type of bullying that has become more prevalent in recent years. As new technology and social media has become accessible to youth, bullying

takes on a new form, this time outside of the school environment. Meyer (2009) defines cyber-bullying as using cell phones, emails, websites or other technology to bully. This definition is useful in that it explains that it is occurring through the use of technology, but it was lacking a focus on social media specifically. Social media is increasingly popular and through my research on bullying has appeared to be a platform for a great amount of bullying behaviors. While Meyer does technically address social media in the "other technology section" it is worthwhile to point out specifically how social media plays a role.

Prevalence of Bullying Behavior and Victimization

Certain social identities affect the prevalence of victimization, as well as the type of bullying received. Gender and sexual orientation specifically can be seen to effect levels of victimization. A study done by Horn (2006) found that gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths were more likely to be victims of bullying than heterosexual youth. Additionally those who were perceived as gender non-conforming were much more likely to be bullied than their peers, even lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth who were gender conforming.

This study suggests that cultural expectations surrounding gender roles play a huge role in who is bullied. Perhaps LGBT youth are being bullied not just for their sexual orientation but for having a higher percentage of youth that do not adhere to strict gender norms. This study gave an interesting perspective on an explanation of what the root of bullying is for LGBT and gender non-conforming youth. This also suggests

possible intervention strategies as working to dismantle gender role norms could also reduce bullying behavior.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans youth are also more likely to be cyber-bullied. 41 percent of LGBT youth reported being cyber-bullied (Meyer 2009). Additionally, the majority of the cyber-bullying analyzed had a sexual bias. These statistics further support the idea that bullying is in large part due to conceptions about gender and sexuality. Bullying can take on a wide variety of roles, but it is important to see the pattern of how conceptions about gender play a role in a large number of bullying cases. Changing ideas about gender roles and norms on a macro and micro level could have a huge impact on bullying behaviors.

Analysis of bullying behavior also shows that males are more likely to report being perpetrators of cyber-bullying or bullying behavior than females (Meyer 2009). This could be due to conceptions about gender and the idea that males are supposed to be more aggressive than females. Additionally, males tend to have stricter gender roles and have a greater negative response to behaving outside of prescribed gender roles than women. In fact, the study done by Horn (2006) found that heterosexual men who behaved or looked different than the stereotypical male were rated as less acceptable than homosexual men who conformed to gender norms. These studies show how toxic masculinity standards on a macro level have a huge effect on bullying in and outside of a school environment.

Consequences of Bullying

Many people believe that bullying is just part of life. They believe that bullying just makes children stronger and tougher. This way of thinking allows for bullying to continue hurting many children and adults across the nation and world. Bullying can have serious short term and long term affects on children, and should not be dismissed. Bullying behavior has a variety of consequences that range from seemingly minor to extreme.

Suicide

Bullying can lead to a number of negative consequences on both the victim and the perpetrator. One of the most severe consequences of bullying behavior is suicide. One survey on bullying behavior of a sample of 9th through 12th graders in Boston found that both the victim and perpetrator report higher levels of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts than populations that were not involved in bullying (Hepburn et al. 2012). This study is important as it shows that bullying is hurting the individuals on both sides of the behavior. It also suggests that there might be other risk factors at play. While it is clear how being bullied could make someone at a higher risk to idealize or attempt suicide, this study does not explain why it is that perpetrators are also at a higher risk.

This study also did not account for the fact that many people do not fall clearly into the perpetrator or victim category. It could be that those who are bullied are more likely to bully others, and it is the bullying that these perpetrators are receiving that is actually the cause for this suicidal behavior. Further research would be needed into the

mindset of perpetrators and factors that put people at higher risk of engaging in bullying behaviors.

There are a number of factors that play into what populations are more likely to attempt suicide. Identities such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation all play a role in both who is more likely to be bullied as well as how bullying can affect these individuals. One data analysis on the New York City Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that sexual minority youths, particularly non-Hispanic male sexual identity minorities were at a higher risk of bullying and suicidal behavior (LeVasseur et al. 2013). This study found that besides the identity of being a sexual minority, many identities did not seem to have a direct impact on bullying or suicidal behaviors. However, there was a four way interaction between gender, sexual identity minority, and ethnic identity with bullying and suicide.

This is an interesting perspective as it shows how people of different genders or ethnic groups may be being bullied for different things. The finding that sexual identity minority male youths were more likely to be bullied and attempt suicide made sense to me as toxic masculinity creates a hostile environment for young gay or bisexual men, and perhaps female sexual identity minorities would not face the same degree of bullying for that particular identity. This study invites researchers to look at how certain intersectional identities may be more vulnerable to bullying, and this can lead to more effective intervention strategies for a school's particular population.

LeVasseur (2013) based his research on data obtained in New York City, so results in other parts of the county may differ vastly. New York City has a particular political and social climate, and thus certain environments may affect bullying behaviors

in different ways. For example, in the South where being gay is even less accepted it's possible that sexual identity minority youths would have even higher rates of bullying or suicidal behavior. Problems specific to cities or rural communities may also influence bullying behaviors. Each of these surveys gives one piece of the puzzle in understand bullying behavior and it's consequences, but in order to be as effective as possible in intervention each school must consider it's own climate on a macro and micro scale.

Decreased Academic Performance

Suicide is one of the more extreme consequences of bullying, but other negative consequences are much more widespread. School is a place where students should be learning, but bullying can impede this process. One study found that students who rated themselves as being victimized and whose peers rated them as being victimized were more likely to have lower academic performance (Juvonen et al. 2010). This study specifically looked at how those who were perceived as being victims of bullying (both by themselves and their peers) engaged academically and faired grade wise. The results suggest that bullying is a serious threat to what schools are all about: learning.

The study discusses how many programs work to increase academic performance in inner city schools, but it does not address the bullying problem. This research explained why learning how to decrease bullying is so important. Schools spend so much money and time working on programs to increase their academics, but they do not spend the time to provide interventions against bullying that may be impeding their student's academic performance.

Other research on bullying in the workplace also show how bullying may be impacting performance both at work and for children at school. One study found that individuals who were frequently bullied in the workplace were more likely to have long and frequent absences from work (Ortega et al. 2011). This shows how bullying can impact performance at work, and how those who are bullied in an environment may be resistant to returning to that environment. This can be generalized to a school setting as well. Students who view school as a hostile unsafe place may be more likely to miss school on a regular basis. Absences can have a huge impact on one's academic performance, and thus students who are missing school to avoid bullying are also missing vital learning opportunities. It is extremely important to make school a safe environment, otherwise learning can not occur.

Mental and Physical Health

Another significant consequence of bullying is a decrease in the victim's psychological and physical health. Studies have shown that being bullied by peers can cause higher levels of psychological distress, adverse health systems and can lead to long term difficulties with health and well being (Rigby 2003). This study is another example of why intervening against bullying is so important. Even after students have left school, the long term consequences of bullying can cause difficulties with health. Childhood bullying continues to follow people into their adult lives. Additionally, this study showed that those who perpetrated bullying were more likely to engage in antisocial and violent behavior later in life. This suggests that intervening with perpetrators of bullying could help prevent negative behavior and crime in the future.

These studies all show how much bullying can effect a child's well being. The solution should not be to a bystander or to let kids "toughen up.' Children's health and academic performance are suffering. Some children are even dying. These studies all show how intervening against bullying should be a top priority for schools. Bullying behavior is not one isolated event; it is interconnected with multiple aspects of student life and well being. School administrators should consider addressing bullying to be just as important as academic funding. A safe environment is the foundation for a successful school.

Why Do Some Students Bully?

Bullying is a complex issue, and can have a number of different factors that influence it. It is important to look at the sociology of bullying and what factors put some students as more likely to bully than others. Looking at sociological factors involved in why people bully can give administrators ideas for how school and home environments effect bullying. Given this information, administrators gain a better idea of how to make school the best environment, and to give special attention to populations at risk of becoming bullies.

Gender and Bullying

On a sociological level, it is important to look at the role of gender in bullying. As discussed earlier, gender non-conforming youth are at an extremely high risk of being victims of bullying, but gender also plays a role in who perpetrates bullying. In one

survey collected 66% of people who admitted to bullying others were male (Ditch the Label 2016). The study suggests that this could be largely due to the differences in which boys and girls are raised. Girls are encouraged to speak up about what is bothering them, while boys are told it is a sign of weakness to display emotions. Since boys are not allowed to use emotion and talking to combat issues, they must find another way to deal with problems in their lives. This can lead to boys becoming physically or verbally aggressive.

Aggressive behavior is seen as more appropriate for boys than for girls, and much more socially accepted than boys showing emotion. If boys choose to be open about their problems and display the emotions they are feeling, this may be seen as not conforming to gender roles. This in turn could lead to the boy being more vulnerable to become a victim of bullying. Boys face a difficult choice when confronted with stress in their lives, they can either set themselves up to be victims of bullying by speaking up about their emotions and being seen as not truly "male", or they may engage in behaviors that lend themselves to be perpetrators of bullying.

Effect of Stress on Bullying Behavior

Stress is another extremely important factor to consider when examining why people bully. The Annual Bullying Survey found that many of the people who perpetrated bullying had had a stressful experience in the past 5 years (Ditch the Label 2016). Response to stress can vary, and for some people it may lead them to bullying behavior. This study examined how gender roles and stress interact to create an environment where men may respond to stress with aggression. Additionally, this study

found that many perpetrators do not spend much time with their family. This brings up the possibility that families may not be teaching their children how to cope with stress, or they may not be there at all for a child to confide in. Without this support system, it makes sense that adolescents do not know how to adequately respond to the stress that teenage years can bring.

One specific stressful event that leads to a higher rate of bullying is people being victims of bullying themselves (Ditch the Label 2016). The study suggests that this could be a defense mechanism; people believe that by bullying others they will no longer be bullied themselves. While this may be the reason many of those who are bullied go on to bully others, it could also be that individuals who are bullied may bully others as a way to prove to themselves and others that they are better than certain other groups. This could be in hopes that other people will bully the same people that they are bullying and get the attention off of him or herself, or it could just be an attempt to prove to him or herself that there are people more deserving of bullying than he/she is. It could also be that peers serve as models for an individual's behaviors, and when someone sees these behaviors frequently they may be more likely to copy them.

Importance of Role Models

Having positive role models is extremely important in preventing bullying. As mentioned earlier, many students who bully do not have parents that are positive role models. This extends beyond the family; peers at school and within a neighborhood can model an individual's behavior greatly. One study found that negative peer influences and neighborhood safety concerns are positively correlated with bullying behaviors

(Espelage et al. 2000). Adolescents often look to peers even more than parents as models for behavior or to seek approval from. If an adolescent is surrounded by peers who bully others, they may come to view this behavior as acceptable or believe that they should participate in order to be accepted by his/her peers. This study highlighted the important role that peers have in an adolescent's life; while much of the focus has been on parents this study shows that peers also become models for behaviors.

One important aspect that this study brought up was that models for behavior extend beyond the school or family setting. Individuals that live in neighborhoods that have higher levels of crime are also more likely to bully others (Espelage et al. 2000). This is due to the fact that there is a variety of aggressive or otherwise negative behavior being exhibited by both other adolescents and adults in their community. Socialization plays a huge role in an individual's behavior, and it is important to understand the variety of social circles that each individual is interacting within. This study suggests that interventions need to be done not just at a school level, but within neighborhoods. This may be through macro level supporting programs and laws to reduce poverty, or through specific target programs per neighborhood. The results of this study invite research into how macro level governmental policies are impacting rates of bullying.

Social Exclusion Anxiety

High school is a time characterized by adolescents focusing greatly on what their peers think of them. Students are looking to belong within a group, to feel included and to be accepted. Based on interviews with students in a particular high school, researchers Schott and Søndergaard (2014) brought up the issue of social exclusion anxiety as a

possible explanation for why people bully. People have a need to be part of a community, and when they feel that this is being threatened by another individual or situation, they can develop extreme anxiety regarding social exclusion. In high school settings, people are expected to become part of friend groups, and so social exclusion becomes a huge fear for adolescents.

In response to this intense fear of social exclusion, bullying behavior can develop for a number of reasons. Individuals may bully another person that they perceive as a threat to his or her acceptance within a group. Bullying the threat serves to prove to the individual's peers that the victim is not as acceptable as he or she is. Bullying often works to highlight ways in which the victim potentially does not fit in within a group. This explains why bullying often occurs even within friend groups. One person in the group may be perceived as threatening or preventing the adolescent from full inclusion. This is why backstabbing behaviors often occur, as a way to eliminate the social exclusion anxiety that can be caused by internal group conflict. Bullying can also be a way to gain inclusion within a group. If other people in the group engage in bullying behaviors, an individual may choose to do so even if they think it is morally wrong in hopes that the group will approve of the behavior and gain acceptance.

This study was very useful to the overall research on bullying because it brought up a new understanding of why bullying occurs even amongst friends. People often have a stereotypical view of the bully and the victim and do not understand how the relationship between these two may even be amicable at first. Additionally, this study examined why bullies may be acting against their own moral standards in a hope for social gain. While this study did not have a particularly large and diverse sample, the

results of this study are invaluable for explaining motivations and thus improving intervention programs. The results of this study also tie into the sociological perspective of Conflict Theory, and thus invites research into how conflict, threats, and a desire for social gain may explain bullying behavior.

Bullying and Conflict Theory

Conflict Theory and the work of Karl Marx can also be used to help understand bullying and related social forces. Karl Marx describes how the bourgeoisie worked to dominate the working class in order to prevent them from gaining access to these resources. The bourgeoisie exploited the working class in order to gain access to valuable resources and labor (Marx 1848). As resources become scarcer or more valuable, conflict will increase. While Marx outlines how conflict theory relates to class relations, this theory can also be applied to explain in part why and how bullying occurs.

Marx (1848) argues that people within a society are always involved in dominant/subordinate relationships. The dominant party benefits off of the exploitation of the subordinate. One can see how this theory may explain bullying relationships. The bully is benefiting off of the exploitation of the victim. The bully now has access to more social status and control while the victim is used as a prop for social gain. One can look at the possible reasons for why people bully others by examining what is gained by the bully.

Conflict Theory in a School Environment

Schools provide an environment that is competitive in many ways, and this competitive nature drives conflict. As people compete for valuable resources such as social status, academic recognition, and attention conflict will often rise. Bullying is a way for individuals or groups to distinguish themselves from the other "lesser" groups. Just as the bourgeoisie worked to distinguish itself from the working class and hold onto the control of resources, bullies are working to distance themselves from the victims and keep control of the resources that are valuable to them. By othering a group, the privileged group gains more access to prized resources.

Studies have shown that there is a negative correlation between desire for social success and support for victims of bullying (Sutton & Keough 2000). Bullying both prevents victims from gaining resources such as social status, while also reinforcing the social status of the bully. It makes sense that bullies would have higher levels of desire for social success as bullying is a way for them to gain that. Bullying helps the perpetrator in multiple ways: it diminishes threats of competition for resources as well as progresses one's own social status. In order to achieve social success, many people feel they have to eliminate potential threats to their access to social capital. Using the perspective of conflict theory one can see how an increase in feelings of competition for resources can drive a bullying relationship. Those with social capital work to hold on to their capital in any way possible, and this includes the exploitation and bullying of peers who threaten their control over this capital. As Marx (1848) states in the Communist Manifesto, social order has largely been maintained by domination, not by social harmony.

Macro Level Influences

Conflict occurring at the macro level may also have a relationship with the micro level conflict within a school environment. For example, studies have shown that as minorities have gained more access to jobs, education and other resources there has been a backlash from whites in America as they now have new competition for these resources (Brief et al. 2005). White parents may resort to prejudice and discrimination against minority ethnic groups because they feel a new sense of competition. Parents play a huge role in social learning and thus many children learn these hateful attitudes from their parents. This learned hatred may be displayed in the form of racial or ethnically based bullying in school.

Contemporary Trends

One can see an example of how conflict theory can be applied to explain both how hateful rhetoric forms on a macro and micro level by looking at the 2016 presidential elections. As one can see from the Trump election, hateful rhetoric against minority groups can even infiltrate children as young as elementary school (Sottile 2016). Much of Trump's rhetoric tapped into the backlash that much of white America has expressed as they feel that immigrants and minorities have been a great source of competition over jobs and other resources. This has had a huge impact on the nature of bullying in school as hateful rhetoric on the macro level has made it common to verbally and physically attack minority groups. One can see that hateful rhetoric against religious and racial minorities has increased.

Bullying of this nature focuses on the idea that certain groups do not belong in America. Teachers have cited instances of children saying things like "build a wall" or that black children should be "sent back to Africa" (Sottile 2016). This ties into conflict theory as much of this anti immigrant message comes from a conflict of competition and the idea that immigrants are stealing the jobs of other Americans. While the children themselves may not directly be competing for jobs and other resources with each other, the effect of the competition on the macro level creates conflict at all levels of society.

Analyzing the causes of bullying through the lens of conflict theory can provide useful information for explaining potential reasons why people bully another. The study conducted by Brief et al. on how conflict theory affects inter-group relations contains important information that can help to explain aspects of why bullying occurs. This study is particularly relevant considering the political atmosphere in America currently. Studies like that of Sutton and Keough (2000) also give insight as to how competition for social resources at a micro level can drive bullying, and who it is that is most likely to bully. These studies show how conflict theory can explain causes of bullying at both macro and micro levels.

Limitations of Conflict Theory

While these studies help us to understand some of the aspects of why people bully, conflict theory cannot be use explain to explain all bullying behaviors. For example, in the Sutton and Keough (2000) study the researchers state that it is competition and desire for social success that drives bullying. This makes sense to some degree; however it does not explain why bullies often choose people that already have far

less social capital to be the victims of their bullying. If it is truly just about competition it would seem to suggest that the victims of bullying would be people who the other bullies saw as a threat. We see in the Brief et al. study that minority groups become targeted for prejudice and discrimination as people perceive them to be more of a threat. However, in many cases of school bullying the bully is often someone who is more popular or has a higher level of social capital picking on people who do not present a threat to the bully's access to social resources. While some parts of school bullying may be related to competition and thus can be explained by conflict theory, this theory can not explain all of the cases of bullying that are seen in schools. More perspectives are needed to understand the multitude of causes for why some people choose to engage in bullying behaviors.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Intervention Policies

Effectiveness of Intervention Programs in Schools

As documentation of bullying in schools has increased, intervention policies and programs have been developed with varying degrees of success. All states have laws that require schools to have some form of anti bullying policy in place, but research shows that many times these policies do not include all the necessary elements such as visibility, intervention, and support, and thus many intervention programs are not effective (Gueldner, Ross, and Isava 2008). Many times laws include protections for only certain populations, and these protections may be limited. For example, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Utah, and New Mexico anti bullying laws do not include protections for gender non conforming students. This is true for other states as well; vulnerable populations are not equally represented in state law and hold differing levels of protections.

Researchers Merrel, Gueldner, Ross, and Isava (2008) conducted a study of school bullying intervention programs across the United States and European nations. They found that intervention programs may produce a slight decrease in bullying behaviors, but usually have no effect. This is a problem as many schools are using resources to prevent bullying but are not having positive outcomes. This research was useful in that it identified the problem and provided meaningful data from a large number of schools, but it did not diagnose what it is that is preventing interventions from succeeding. Further research is needed to identify what programs do and do not work, and potentially experimental data would be useful in evaluating effectiveness.

Although previous research has found that the majority of anti bullying programs have little to no effect, researcher William Hall (2017) found that programs that included

certain elements could have high levels of success. These elements were "a definition of bullying; procedures and consequences for bullies; plans for disseminating the policy to students, school personnel, and parents; programs or practices that encourage acceptance of diversity, empathy for others, respect toward others, peer integration, and responsible use of power; supervision of students in school areas prone to bullying (e.g., playground, cafeteria, and hallways); and socio-emotional skills training for victims and bullies" (Hall 2017). Programs high in these elements resulted in lower rates of physical and verbal bullying. This research suggests that there are many factors that influence the effectiveness of anti bullying programs. The majority of programs focus on only one or two elements, for example many schools have punishments for bullies and supervision. However, in order to be successful one must work to both prevent bullying and confront it when it occurs. School wide encouragement of respect and acceptance are needed in addition to punishments for bullies. Additionally, this research stated the importance of having programs that go beyond the classroom; parents must be included in anti bullying policies as well.

This research also found that policies that specifically address LGBT issues resulted in a substantial decrease in bullying towards this population (Hall 2017). This suggests that explicit attention to vulnerable populations can greatly improve school environments for these populations. Another element that Hall should add to his list of a successful program should be inclusion of vulnerable populations in policy. Schools should know what populations are more likely to be victimized according to research and their own specific school environment. Protections should then be explicitly outlined for these groups in order to protect those at high risk of victimization.

Inclusion of Vulnerable Populations in Intervention Policies

LGBT Youth

Research has shown that LGBT individuals are at a greater risk of being victims of bullying. Intervention programs that aim to protect vulnerable populations need to address the high level of bullying of LGBT youth. Research indicates that intervention policies that specifically address the effect of perceived homosexuality are more effective at combating bullying towards this population (Russell 2011).

Stephen Russell (2011) found that a variety of strategies worked to create a safer environment for LGBT youth. These include: enumerated school non discrimination and anti bullying policies, teacher intervention when bullying or harassment takes place, availability and support about LGBT concerns for students, the presence of school based support groups or clubs for LGBT students, and curricular inclusion of LGBT people and issues.

Russel's research was supported in a study done by Mark Hatzenbuehler and Katherine Keyes (2013). This study found that anti bullying policies that were LGBT inclusive and specifically outlined bullying intervention in this population were much more effective in reducing bullying and harm done by bullying than policies that were not LGBT inclusive. Schools that did not have LGBT inclusive policies (such as the inclusion of the strategies outlined by Russell) had 2.25 times higher rates of suicide attempts than schools whose policies were LGBT inclusive.

This research suggests that not only do schools need generic anti bullying policies, but there should be specific inclusion of LGBT issues both in policies and

visibility of LGBT students and issues across school programs and curriculum. This study notes that teachers should be intervening when bullying takes place. This means that, in order to have a safer school environment, teachers should both understand what bullying is and how to see it, and understand their responsibility to intervene. Additionally, school administrators need to play a role in supporting LGBT youth and should be allowing space for support groups in which peers can support each other. As researchers Dorothy Espelage and Susan Swearer (2008) found, support networks are vital to reducing the effects of bullying on psychological well being for LGBT youth. A successful intervention program would work to both prevent bullying and to reduce the harmful effects of it, especially for vulnerable populations such as LGBT youth who are more likely to have severe psychological and physical responses to victimization (Espelage & Swearer 2008)

This study highlights the fact that successful anti bullying programs may not be a specific program but rather focus on setting up a safe school environment. Prevention of bullying may be direct intervention through anti bullying programs or teacher intervention, they may be through support through things like support groups or clubs, or they may be more indirect through things like including LGBT issues in curriculum. For schools that may not have the resources to implement major anti bullying programs, simple changes in curriculum can make a huge difference in the overall school environment. It is important to consider all the factors that play a role in creating a safe environment for students.

Gender non-conforming youth

Research has shown that gender roles play a large role in bullying behaviors in schools. Students who do not conform to specific expectations based on perceived gender are often victimized. This is true of LGBT individuals and of individuals who are straight but do not conform strictly to traditional gender roles. Since gender role based bullying is so prevalent in schools, this suggests that special attention to gender roles is needed in order to have a successful intervention program against bullying.

This reaction against those who violate traditional gender roles may manifest in a variety of different ways. One example is transphobic language and actions. Transgender students may violate many students' ideas about traditional gender roles as their actions may be in accordance with a different gender than the student perceives them to be. Research shows that this form of bullying is linked to how our culture embraces heteronormativity, the assumption that all people are heterosexual and cisgender (Mitchell, Gray & Beninger 2014). The social construction of heteronormativity can be challenged by schools in a number of ways, and the deconstruction of this concept can lead to a much safer environment.

Normalizing diversity in gender is a crucial step in deconstruction heteronormativity. This can be done through simple changes in curriculum. Use of the word transgender as well as learning about people in history who were transgender can get people used to the term, and end the initial discomfort or negative reaction when a student first hears terms like this (Mitchell, Gray & Beninger 2014). Additionally, when teaching about relationships the use of gender neutral terms, such as partners, prevents the assumption that every relationship is heteronormative. This is also useful when

addressing classmates, using terms like friends, peers, or students instead of boys and girls can reduce some of the strict gender binaries and gender identity assumptions in classrooms (Mitchell, Gray & Beninger 2014). This requires training of the staff to be knowledgeable about the negative consequences of gender role assumptions as well as teaching staff to be comfortable addressing gender identity. Visibility is extremely important in normalizing diversity, and thus teachers need to learn to not shy away from topics of gender.

Gender role based bullying manifests in other ways besides transphobia. The types of bullying that boys and girls are more likely to engage in (for example physical aggression for boys, gossiping for girls) is also highly shaped by traditional gender roles (Iossi Silva, Pereira, Mendonca, Nunes, and Oliviera 2013). Research shows that the current focus on bullying behavior often assumes that the bully has a set of specific personality traits that makes them likely to bully others, and does not include the way that culture, and specifically gender roles, plays a role in the types and prevalence of bullying (Iossi Silva, Pereira, Mendonca, Nunes, Oliviera 2013).

Additionally, much of the sexual harassment that girls and boys face comes down to traditional gender roles. For example, the use of the word "slut" is based on the traditional gender role that women should remain chaste. Men being called "fags" or "pussies" also are a result of gender roles of dominance and aggression in males. These forms of sex based harassment are so normalized that teachers often do not even perceive these actions as bullying, but instead view it as just teasing or an expected part of adolescence (Lahelma 2010). Due to this, many teachers choose not to intervene in cases of sex based harassment.

Teachers need to condemn all acts of bullying and recognize that gender specific bullying is just as harmful as any other type. Gender specific interventions such as including diverse gender roles in curriculum, intervention by teachers, and a school ethos of acceptance are all necessary to reduce the bullying faced by students who do not conform to traditional gender norms (Iossi Silva, Pereira, Mendonca, Nunes, and Oliviera 2013).

Racial and Religious Minorities

Unlike some other vulnerable populations, racial and religous minorities often have laws that are supposed to prevent bullying and discrimination. However, many other factors often play into the bullying and discrimination that racial and religious minorities receive. Many times, this bullying may occur on an implicit level and be a result of community issues rather than lack of laws. Additionally, as government officials, including the president, have made prejudice remarks toward racial and religous minorities, many people in the United States have felt emboldened in their bullying behaviors of racial and ethnic minorities both in and out of schools.

Although segregation is no longer legal, schools today are still highly segregated. The history of segregation and relocating of racial minorities has pushed many minorities into certain communities away from whites (Rothstein 2004). This means that many white students are rarely coming into contact with students of other racial groups (Rothstein 2004). In predominately white schools, racial minority students often lose a sense of voice and visibility in their school. On a macro level, more work needs to be done to desegregate schools and to create equal educational opportunities for minorities.

At the school level, research suggest that schools who have few racial minority students need to pay special attention to make sure that they are including analysis of race and racism in their curriculum and in school wide policy (Decuir & Dixson 2004).

The research done by Decuir and Dixson (2004) ties into the research on LGBT and gender non conforming youth that emphasizes the fact that visibility and a school wide non discrimination policy is necessary for protecting vulnerable populations. The strategies for preventing bullying for specific populations follows a similar formula: enumerated school non discrimination and anti bullying policies, teacher intervention when bullying or harassment takes place, and visibility through curricular inclusion, school based clubs etc. It is important for schools to learn about which populations are the most susceptible to be victimized and thus implement specific programs according to this formula that increase the visibility and knowledge of information relating to that population.

This segregation of schools can interact with the political climate and create an unsafe environment for racial and religious minorities. Research shows that the recent political climate, specifically President Trump's prejudicial comments, have emboldened students as young as elementary school to bully others based on their religious or racial identities (Sottile 2016). Conflict theory explains how this is likely due to competition for jobs and resources resulting in "othering" of religious and racial minorities; Trump increased this panic by suggesting that certain religions and races were taking the jobs of the working class white Americans. Research shows that the segregation of schools makes it easier for students to "other" and silence minority groups (Decuir & Dixson 2004). Students in these segregated communities are not exposed to people of other racial

or religious backgrounds, thus a lack of empathy and a greater sense of inter-group conflict is created.

Issues that result in racial and ethnic bullying are largely at the macro level and out of reach of individual schools. However, schools can do their part to bridge the gap between communities by increasing visibility of racial and religious minority populations. For racial and religious minority youth in particular, visibility appears to be the key issue that fosters an unsafe environment. Much work needs to be done at the governmental and economic levels to desegregate communities, but schools can do their part in this desegregation by doing what they are meant to do: educate.

Obstacles to Implementation of Intervention

Creating a safe environment at school is vital to the mental, physical, and academic well being of students. However, schools face a number of obstacles in implementing policies that would prevent bullying. Schools may face trouble on micro, mezzo, and macro levels through budgets, laws, or staff that prevent the school from reaching its full potential.

Staff play an important role in the school environment and can directly and indirectly have a relationship with bullying behavior. Teachers have a huge impact on the micro level classroom environment of each student. One issue that arises is that school administrators may not recognize the full extent of bullying within a school. Research has shown that many times staff report believing a lower percentage of students are experiencing bullying than the students report themselves (Espelage & Swearer 2004).

This can be due to a number of factors. Students may not report bullying to teachers the same way they would for an anonymous survey as many students feel they will not receive help or that there will be retaliation from the perpetrator (Espelage & Swearer 2004). Additionally, teachers may have different definitions of what constitutes bullying. Research has found that many teachers do not include social exclusion in their definition of bullying, and thus are less likely to intervene in instances of social exclusion than other forms of bullying (Espelage & Swearer 2004).

It is extremely important that teachers be trained in bullying intervention. The effects of all types of bullying, including social exclusion, are severe. Teachers play an important role in the student environment, intervention or lack of intervention from teachers can determine a child's safety. This research pointed out the lack of training of many teachers in America. In fact, over a third of teachers themselves reported wishing they received more training (Espelage & Swearer 2004). Teachers should understand all types of bullying and their effects. Since so many students are afraid to come forward, training is necessary for teachers so they can pick up on any signs of bullying in their classrooms and intervene.

Schools often face challenges combating bullying due to budgets. Lower budgets or budget cuts mean fewer resources such as counselors, administrators and teachers who all have a role in the prevention of bullying (Phillips 2011). While it may seem impossible to implement anti bullying policies with low budgets, it is important to consider the financial cost that bullying puts on schools. Rick Phillips found that through the costs of truancy, suspensions, vandalism, dropping out, mandatory disciplinary alternative education placements, and expulsions (all of which are directly related to

bullying levels), the average school is losing around 2,314,600 dollars every year. This research is extremely important in showing schools that anti bullying policies are worth the cost and can actually save a significant amount of money for schools.

On a macro level, laws play a significant role in the effectiveness and availability of intervention programs. Reducing bullying for the LGBT and gender non conforming community in particular is difficult as certain laws prevent schools from doing a number of things that would help create a safe environment for these students. Protections vary greatly by state. New Jersey for example, has one of the toughest anti bullying laws, "The Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights" which provides a number of protections including stating that teachers who do not investigate reports of bullying can face disciplinary action (Friedman 2010). Many other states however, especially in the Southeast, do not have such protections. Researcher Ryan Thoreson (2017) outlines the many obstacles that prevent the protection of the LGBT student population. For example, numerous states such as Alabama, Louisiana, Texas and others have laws that restrict teachers from talking about LGBT issues at school (Thoreson 2017). This also restricts LGBT based school support groups or clubs. Additionally, many states do not have laws that prohibit bullying in schools or workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Thoreson 2017).

Laws that do not allow for discussion about LGBT issues directly oppose the strategies to reducing LGBT bullying outlined by Russell (2011) such as enumerated school non discrimination and anti-bullying policies, availability of information, school based support groups or clubs and curricular inclusion of LGBT issues. Examples of laws that limit availability of information and promote discrimination include an Alabama

State Code that states, "Classes must emphasize, in a factual manner and from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state." (Ford 2014). An Arizona law that states, "No district shall include in its course of study instruction which:1. Promotes a homosexual life-style.2. Portrays homosexuality as a positive alternative life-style. 3. Suggests that some methods of sex are safe methods of homosexual sex." (Ford 2014). A South Carolina law, "The program of instruction provided for in this section may not include a discussion of alternate sexual lifestyles from heterosexual relationships including, but not limited to, homosexual relationships except in the context of instruction concerning sexually transmitted diseases." (Ford 2014). These are just a few examples of laws, often called no promo homo laws, that enforce censorship of LGBT issues with the argument that discussion of LGBT issues will promote homosexuality. This means that students are deprived of information, support, and protection from discrimination. Due to these laws, schools in many states are not legally allowed to create a safe environment for LGBT and gender non conforming students.

In order to create a safe environment in schools, laws have to allow for policies that foster a welcoming environment. It is important that laws are created which allow for protections of vulnerable populations. There are currently no federal laws that outline necessary protections for vulnerable populations, and thus some states do not implement laws protecting LGBT youth, racial and religious minorities, or gender non conforming students at all (Thoreson 2017). Involvement of the federal government may aid in ensuring protection for vulnerable populations. Additionally, laws that limit the teaching

of information on LGBT issues need to be eliminated. Currently, many laws are working to make vulnerable populations invisible instead of working to protect them and this needs to change.

These laws are a result of social prejudice at the legal level. Social prejudice within the nation can affect bullying levels in a variety of ways, not just in terms of legal aid. As outlined in Chapter 1, dialogue in the media surrounding immigrants and competition for jobs has resulted in a sense of competition between religious and racial groups (Brief et al. 2005). This feeling that racial and religious minorities are competition for valued resources can translate into racism and religious intolerance. Due to recent political movements that focus on this competition, racist and religiously intolerant speech has become normalized, and this speech is even becoming prominent within schools (Sottile 2016).

A history of laws and discrimination that have segregated neighborhoods and communities creates a barrier to fostering safe environments for racial and religious minorities. It is extremely important that students have contact with other cultures; it has been shown that inter-group contact can greatly reduce racial anxiety and improve race relations (Tropp & Godsil 2014). While schools can do their part to educate about other cultures, it is vital that students be directly exposed to them as well.

The research done by Tropp and Godsil (2014) shows how the infrastructure of the entire country and its layout plays a role in racial relations and bullying at the micro level. The economic and political system that has systematically disadvantaged minorities through things like gentrification, mass incarceration, job discrimination etc. needs major reform in order to allow for diverse communities and a greater level of inter-group

contact. While many of these issues may not seem to be directly tied to bullying in schools, it is important to consider all the sociological factors that influence the individuals within a school and the schools overall environment.

Chapter 3: Methods and Results

Methods

Overview

Case studies of bullying intervention programs in the New York State capital region were conducted. Guidance Counselors answered questionnaires about how their school's bullying intervention program incorporate visibility, support, and intervention for vulnerable populations. Vulnerable populations were defined as LGBT youth, gender non-conforming youth, and racial or religious minorities. Respondents were also asked how effective they believed their programs to be.

Sampling Population

The population sampled was local middle and high schools in the New York State capital region. Emails were sent to secretaries of guidance counseling centers asking if any guidance counselors would be willing to answer a questionnaire. Thirteen schools were contacted, and three schools responded. The three schools consisted of two high schools and one middle school. The schools were from towns ranging from middle to upper class. All schools were public.

Distribution and Description of Questionnaire

After contacting the secretaries, a guidance counselor from three different schools reached out. The questionnaire was then sent to the guidance counselor via email, and the respondent was told that all responses would be confidential. The questionnaire was twelve questions, although modifications were given to one high school which did not

have a specific anti bullying policy. The initial questionnaire assumed the school had an anti bullying policy in place and thus the modified questionnaire was necessary to get the answers needed from the high school that did not have one. The questionnaire addressed the research question of how to protect vulnerable populations. Particularly, whether increased visibility, support, and interventions for the three populations outlined as being vulnerable (LGBT youth, gender non conforming youth, and racial/religious minorities) was an effective strategy for reducing bullying. Guidance counselors were asked questions about each of these populations and how they engage visibility, support, and intervention in their programs. The format of the two questionnaires was as following:

Questionnaire 1

- Job Title:

- Job Responsibilities:

- Briefly summarize what bullying intervention programs you have in place at this school?

- How effective do you think these programs are? Why?

- Who do you consider to be the vulnerable population in your school? What population is most at risk to become bullies?

- How does your program protect vulnerable populations: specifically individuals who do not conform to strict gender roles, LGBT youth, and racial/religious minorities?

- Does your program direct any special attention to males and male gender roles?

- Does your school have clubs for LGBT youth? Clubs for cultural minorities?

- Does school curriculum include issues specific to LGBT youth, racial/religious minorities, and gender non-conforming youth?

- Are guidance counselors at this school trained specifically in supporting LGBT youth, gender non-conforming students, and racial/religious minority students?

- Are teachers at this school trained in bullying intervention?

- Do you feel there have been obstacles in the implementation of your school's anti-bullying policy?

Questionnaire 2 (Modified for School without Anti-Bullying Policy)

- Job Title:

- Job Responsibilities:

- Do you think your school struggles with bullying?

- Who do you consider to be the vulnerable population in your school? What population is most at risk to become bullies?

- Does your school have clubs for LGBT youth? Clubs for cultural minorities?

- Does school curriculum include issues specific to LGBT youth, racial/religious minorities, and gender non-conforming youth?

- Are guidance counselors at this school trained specifically in supporting LGBT youth, gender non-conforming students, and racial/religious minority students?

- Are teachers at this school trained in bullying intervention?

- Do you feel there have been obstacles preventing your school from starting an anti-bullying policy?

Results

High School 1

Profile of Respondent:

       Respondent is a High School Guidance Counselor. The respondent provides academic, personal, social and career based counseling to high school students. Respondent represents a local public high school with predominant middle class students.

Visibility:

       Clubs were available for LGBT youth and cultural minority youth to participate in. Additionally, school curriculum in the courses of health, psychology, and history included discussions on LGBT and cultural minority youth. The school also held some workshops on issues for LGBT and cultural minority youth. While these two groups had some forms of visibility, less visibility was afforded to gender non-conforming youth as there was no attention to gender roles in the current programs.

Support:

       Guidance counselors are exposed to students of different backgrounds during professional development, but do not have specific training for these populations. There are some resources for support, but nothing specific to the issues faced by the outlined vulnerable populations (LGBT youth, gender non-conforming youth, racial and religious minorities).

Intervention:

Teachers are trained in intervention through facility meeting presentations. However, the intervention training is not specific to the vulnerable populations but is for general bullying intervention. Teachers are taught to complete Dignity for All Student Act reports if they witness bulling. Additionally, a student resource officer tracks DASA referrals at this school.

Effectiveness:

The respondent stated they believed their programs to be effective and that the school showed a zero tolerance policy. This may be tracked by the number of DASA reports completed. However, she noted that some teachers have expressed feeling uncomfortable completing DASA reports when they see bullying if they do not believe it to be serious enough. This suggests that number of reports may not accurately express the level of bullying at the school. Additionally, more training for teachers in this area on the definition and consequences of bullying would likely contribute to effectiveness of the program.

High School 2

Profile of Respondent:

Respondent is a High School Counselor that provides academic, personal, social and career based counseling to high school students. Respondent represents a local public high school with predominantly middle-upper class students.

Visibility:

LGBT youth clubs as well as a number of multicultural clubs are prominent within the school. Additionally, there is a club dedicated to raising awareness of bullying issues across populations: Students Advocating for a Positive Environment. While LGBT issues are mentioned in health class, there is no policy that articulates that curriculum should be inclusive of these issues. However, there are some courses such as "The African American Experience" that are specific to issues faced by cultural minorities. Attention to gender roles is not prominent within the school. Visibility is mixed with higher visibility for LGBT and cultural minorities than gender non-conforming youth. Visibility in curriculum is relatively low; however the inclusion of vulnerable population specific courses is helpful to visibility of cultural minorities.

Support:

There is no official training program in the school for counselors on support specifically for the outlined vulnerable populations. However, there are workshops available, and some counselors have attended. Student panels that present at certain faculty meetings may also address issues for these populations. Overall, support for these populations is fairly limited in that there is no specific training dedicated to these issues.

Intervention:

There is no specific anti-bullying program at this school and teachers are not trained in intervention. While there is some bullying intervention by administrators at this

school, there is no specific policy that instructs how to properly intervene or what to look out for. Intervention at this school is the lowest of the three schools.

Effectiveness:

Effectiveness is mixed. While some students report feeling that the bullying levels of this school are lower than at other schools, other students report feeling a high level of bullying. Additionally, racial and sexual harassment issues at this school have been prominent in recent years. As there is no specific program directed to bullying, there is also no quantitative record or reports of how much bullying is experienced at the school.

Middle School

Profile of Respondent:

Respondent is a Middle School Counselor. The respondent provides academic, personal, social and career based counseling to middle school students. Respondent represents a public middle school in a middle-upper class district.

Visibility:

The school had clubs for LGBT youth and cultural minorities. Additionally, there was a club on working with males and having young males engage with positive role models and learning positive social and emotional behaviors. This brings attention to gender roles and works to break up the strict gender roles for men that require men to be aggressive and masculine. This attention to gender roles brings visibility to gender non-conforming students and may makes peers more accepting of those who deviate from the

norm. Additionally, this school's anti-bullying program required curriculum, specifically in health classes, to be inclusive of the issues of these populations. This was done through presentations by a Counseling Office Tolerance Program, as well as the No Place for Hate Initiative. The visibility at this school for all three outlined vulnerable populations was relatively high.

Support:

School Counselors at this school attend trainings each year that focus on working on these issues. They also meet with administration on a regular basis to review plans put forth throughout the school and review guidelines set forth by the NYS Education Department regarding bullying and vulnerable populations. Support at this school is relatively high.

Intervention:

This school district provides trainings and professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators in regards to the issues for LGBT youth, gender non-conforming youth and cultural minorities. This suggests that intervention levels at this school are moderate to high.

Effectiveness:

The respondent believed the anti-bullying program at this school to be very effective. The anti bullying program was fairly robust as it included medium to high

levels of visibility, support and intervention. He cited open communication and decreased

reports of bullying since implementation as evidence of the efficacy.

Chapter 4: Discussion

Comparison of Schools

The three schools had varying levels of visibility, support and intervention. All three schools tended to score relatively high for visibility, with some advantages and additional protections being seen in the middle school. However, on the issues of intervention and support the schools ranged from having little to no intervention and support to having high degrees of support for all outlined populations. The differences in effectiveness of the programs were largely reflective of the variation in degrees of visibility, support, and intervention of the three schools.

All schools included clubs for LGBT individuals and cultural minorities. However, only the middle school had clubs that addressed gender roles and gender non conforming individuals. Additionally, the level of curricular inclusion varied widely. High School 1 had some workshops on issues faced by these populations, but no specific inclusions in curriculum. High School 2 also did not have policies outlining curricular inclusion; however there were some courses that were directed at issues faced by these populations. High School 1 and 2 had similar levels of visibility, with slightly higher visibility in High School 1 as there were some workshops on the issues faced by vulnerable populations that the entire school was required to attend rather than just elective courses like those of High School 2. Overall, the middle school had the highest form of visibility as they included clubs for all three outlined vulnerable population, and had programs requiring the curricular inclusion of issues relating to these populations in courses such as health and history.

The middle school also seemed to display the highest level of support available for the vulnerable populations. Both high schools did not have specific training for counselors in supporting these populations, and while workshops were available for counselors at High School 2, they were not required to attend. The middle school however, required their counselors to be trained in how to support all three vulnerable populations, and to meet with administration to be sure the goals outlined by the New York State Education Department regarding prevention of bullying and harassment were being met.

The three schools varied the most widely on the issue of intervention. High School 2 did not have any formal intervention training for teachers or administrators. High School 1 had a higher level of intervention as the school practiced general anti bullying intervention training for teachers, but did not include training specific to vulnerable populations. The middle school provided trainings and professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators specific to all three outlined vulnerable population. The middle school again had the most robust program in relation to intervention.

Effectiveness of the schools anti bullying policies was harder to gage as the answers provided by the respondents were largely subjective. Quantitative evidence for decreases in bullying was prevalent in High School 1 and the Middle School which both tracked the number of bullying reports and cited a decrease in number of reports. However, the exact amount of reports was not specified, and in the case of High School 2 which expressed some reluctance of teachers to fill out reports, the number of reports may not be completely reflective of the amount of bullying incidents. Additionally, since

High School 2 did not have a specific anti bullying program, there was no tracking system in place of number of bullying reports. Respondents from High School 1 and the Middle School both believed their schools to have relatively low bullying problems, while the respondent from High School 2 believed that bullying was still a somewhat prevalent issue at his school.

Comparison to Literature

The results of the case study of three local schools supported prior research on effective anti bullying policy strategies. Research on effective anti bullying policy for LGBT youth, gender non conforming youth, and cultural minority youth all suggested that visibility, support, and intervention was necessary for protection of these populations. Since these specific populations are targeted at such high rates, it is important that all three populations are represented in anti-bullying policy.

The main research used to identify this model and examples of what this model would entail was the research done by Stephen Russell (2007) which found that the keys to a successful intervention program for LGBT youth was: enumerated school non discrimination and anti bullying policies, teacher intervention when bullying or harassment takes place, availability and support about LGBT concerns for students, the presence of school based support groups or clubs for LGBT students, and curricular inclusion of LGBT people and issues. Enumerated school non discrimination and anti bullying policies and teacher intervention goes under the category of intervention.

Availability and support for LGBT students goes under support. Clubs and curricular inclusion were examples of visibility.

The effectiveness of these intervention strategies was further supported for LGBT youth and other populations like gender non conforming youth and cultural minorities in a variety of studies. Examples include the Espelage and Swearer (2008) study which found, support networks are vital to reducing the effects of bullying on psychological well being for LGBT youth. Mitchell, Gray and Beninger's (2014) study that found using gender neutral terms and discussion on gender roles can reduce bias against gender non conforming individuals. Decuir & Dixon's (2004) study that found inclusion of analysis of race and racism in curriculum and in school wide policy can reduce racial bias. These studies confirmed that aspects of visibility, support and intervention could be useful in anti-bullying programs for a variety of populations.

The results of my study found the same strategies to result in more highly effective anti bullying programs. The Middle School had the highest level of effectiveness and also included the most visibility, support, and intervention practices. Visibility through curricular inclusion and school clubs, support from counselors, and teacher training in intervention for vulnerable populations were all prevalent at the Middle School. This school also stated that they had very low levels of bullying, and stated that the number of reports of bullying have decreased since the implantation of this program.

High School 1 also reported low levels of bullying. This school ranked in the middle on visibility, support, and intervention. Curricular inclusion and visibility was higher for LGBT youth and cultural minorities than for gender non-conforming youth,

and intervention was not population specific. However, the school did include many of the aspects outlined by previous research such as cultural and LGBT clubs and some curricular inclusion of LGBT issues in classes. However, there was no part of the program dedicated to gender non-conforming youth, and guidance counselors were not trained specifically in issues relating to any of the outlined vulnerable population.

Research such as Stephen Russell's (2007) study found that in addition to general non-discrimination policies, it was very important for schools to have programs that address vulnerable populations specifically. The lack of inclusion of gender non-conforming youth and racial/religious minorities in the program was an issue for this school. Since I did not have access to quantitative data confirming the exact levels of bullying at each school, it can not be determined whether the Middle School or High school 1 had lower levels of bullying. If the Middle School was proven to have lower rates of bullying than High School 1 this would further support prior research.

The results from High School 2 were the most useful in comparison of the results of this case study to prior research. High School 2 had the lowest number of practices involving visibility, support, and intervention. Other than clubs for LGBT youth and cultural minorities, the factors outlined by Stephen Russell (2007) and other research on how to increase visibility, support and intervention for these populations was missing. Additionally, gender non-conforming individuals did not have any representation in the school's anti-bullying policy which, according to research by Russell (2007), puts them at higher risk of bullying. The respondent from this school also reported that they believe bullying to be a prominent issue at this school, unlike the respondents from the Middle

School and High School 1. This suggests that there may be a relationship between visibility, support, and intervention.

The results from the Middle School and High School 1 (which included many of the aspects outlined by prior research) on their own is not enough to suggest that visibility, support and intervention result in effective anti bullying policy. However, when compared to High School 2 which did not have high levels of visibility, support, and intervention and had higher levels of issues with bullying, it suggests that a relationship between visibility, support, and intervention and levels of bullying is likely. Even in a small case study of three organizations, one can see that research on effective anti bullying policy holds true.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Summary and Significance

This study investigated how inclusion of elements of visibility, support, and intervention impacted the effectiveness off anti bullying policy for vulnerable populations. Vulnerable populations were considered to be LGBT youth, gender non-conforming youth, and racial or religious minority youth. Respondents, all guidance counselors, from three schools in the New York State Capital region answered questionnaires on the inclusion of the outlined elements for each vulnerable population in their school's anti bullying policy.

The anti bullying policies at the three different schools showed a range from low inclusion of visibility, support and intervention to high levels of inclusion. Additionally, LGBT youth at all three schools were more likely to have higher levels of visibility, support and intervention while gender non-conforming youth had the lowest rates of inclusion. Overall, the school with the highest level of inclusion reported a higher level of effectiveness of their policy in reducing anti bullying than the school with the lowest level of inclusion of the outlined elements. This further supported previous research on effective anti bullying policy.

This study supports previous research on effective anti bullying policy, but has also provides a new perspective on anti bullying policy. Previous research recommended different strategies for each of the vulnerable population, but did not specify overall themes that increased effectiveness. Some research focused on strategies under the theme of visibility while others on support or intervention. This research combined all the previous strategies into three themes. This provides research that all three vulnerable

populations may be helped by each of the three outlined elements. The results of this study also indicate that these elements make up an effective model for anti bullying policy and allows schools to create their own unique ways of incorporating visibility, support, and intervention that best fit the school. This gives schools more freedom to create an anti bullying policy that suits them and is more practical for their population. Additionally, if schools find that they have vulnerable populations within their school that are unique to their community, this model may be applicable to any vulnerable population, not just those outlined above.

Due to the serious consequences of bullying on many individuals, it is extremely important that research focuses on how to implement effective anti bullying policy. The results of this study are significant in that they provide a model to reduce bullying for LGBT youth, gender non-conforming youth, racial/religious minorities or other unique vulnerable populations. Bullying has cost thousands of lives and has harmed many more, but many anti bullying policies are failing to help schools. Research on effective models of anti bullying policy is extremely important as reduction of bullying is vital to our society. Reduction of bullying means students are able to complete their education safely, with lower chances of physical, mental, or social harm.

Limitations

It is important to note that this study relied on responses from a questionnaire and not on numerical data in any form. This study was entirely qualitative and thus is subject to the limitations and subjectivity that come from human nature. However, due to the

nature of this subject, research depended on answers from people and could not be explained using numerical data, which brings a degree of subjectivity. I tried to combat this by asking very specific questions about what elements were involved in policies, however there is still the possibility that respondents misrepresented how often and strictly these parts of their policies are applied. Specifically, the question of how effective the respondent believed their school policies to be was highly subjective and respondents did not give quantitative data to back up their responses.

The respondents of this study were school counselors, and may have had a desire or training to represent their school in a positive light. Thus, they may have made their program seem more robust than it is, or stated that they have less of a bullying problem than they do. I worked to combat this by assuring the respondents that their answers would be anonymous and they should be as honest as possible. However, some of the respondents may have still felt they should represent their school positively, or may have an unconscious bias towards their school that affected their responses.

One major limitation was that the respondents were speaking for the vulnerable populations, but were not members of the populations that were being bullied themselves. Hearing from the students themselves would have provided a more accurate representation of the effectiveness of the policy. However since the students were minors, they were not accessible to me in this study due to time and legal constraints. Since students were not accessible, I chose guidance counselors to be the respondents as they were the population most likely to be educated on the anti bullying policy, as well as have the most direct contact with students on reports of bullying.

Further Research: Going Beyond the Classroom

The skills and knowledge that students learn through in school bullying prevention programs will likely carry over with them into their lives outside of school. However, school should not be the only place where intervention takes place. A large amount of research has been dedicated to bullying within schools, but it is important to consider that bullying is occurring in all environments of a student's life. Additionally, certain issues in the community will likely result in increased bullying in the school anvironment. Anti bullying policies should take a holistic approach and understand the interconnection of environments in a student's behavior. In order to create a safe environment for youth in and outside of the classroom, schools need to work with community programs to make sure that anti bullying efforts do not stop when a child goes home.

As described in the research by Tropp and Godsil (2014), economic and political situations, particularly regarding to racial relations, can play a huge role in the experience of youth in a community. Poverty in particular can have a great impact on bullying behaviors. In impoverished communities, many parents are working multiple jobs, thus leaving their children unsupervised for longer periods of time (Afterschool Alliance 2007). Additionally, many parents in impoverished communities, particularly in communities that have a high concentration of minorities, are incarcerated (Wildeman and Western 2010). Incarceration of a family member is linked to an increase in children's aggression, behavioral problems, and social marginalization (Wildeman and Western 2010). It also means youth do not have the opportunity to model behaviors from

a parent that is missing, as well as having one less person to be able to supervise outside of school time.

There is a strong link between unsupervised time and problem behaviors, including physically violent forms of bullying such as assault (Afterschool Alliance 2007). Impoverished communities have specific concerns, and interventions need to go beyond the school environment in order to effectively reduce these concerns and create a safer environment for vulnerable populations in all aspects of life.

Research has shown that bullying often occurs in unsupervised areas, and this can be a problem for communities who have a lot of opportunity for unsupervised gatherings of youth (U.S Department of Health and Human Services n.d). This is why it is important to engage parents and community members in anti bullying efforts. After school programs and community interventions are necessary outside of the school environment to prevent bullying at times that may be especially high risk to certain populations. Many people may feel that it is the school that should respond to bullying and thus there needs to be some overlap; schools need to take initiative into getting the community involved in their efforts.

Research shows that on a community level, after school programs are a successful intervention to critical issues in impoverished communities as they provide supervision during critical times, teach positive behaviors and skills, and provide role models for community members (Afterschool Alliance 2007). This suggests that involvement of after school programs may lead to a decrease in bullying. It would be interesting to see the effects if the three themed model of visibility, support, and intervention were to play a role in the organization of after school programs, or if these factors are already highly

incorporated. Programs do not necessarily need to have a specific anti bullying program, but could incorporate factors that decrease bullying into their day to day activities. For example, programs could involve discussions of LGBT concerns (visibility and support), crafts relating to art of different cultures (visibility), usage of gender neutral pronouns (visibility), and after school counselors trained in intervention. If after school and community programs adopted these features, it is possible that bullying inside and out of the classroom would decrease.

While the focus of my study has been on effective anti-bullying policy within schools; the themes outlined could potentially be applied in a variety of different domains. Potentially any organization that involved groups of children under supervision could implement some variety of the themes in this model, whether it is in after school programs, sports, day care or other settings. Further research would be needed to see if this model would still be effective in reducing bullying if implemented outside of the school environment.

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