

TRAJECTORIES OF PARENTS' EXPERIENCES IN DISCOVERING, REPORTING,  
AND LIVING WITH THE AFTERMATH OF MIDDLE SCHOOL BULLYING

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## ABSTRACT

James Roger Brown

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Bully victimization takes place within a social context of youths' parents, peers, teachers, school administrators, and community. Victims often rely on parents, educators, or peers for support. However, there is a gap in the literature in understanding parents' experiences of what occurs before, during, and after reporting bullying to school officials. Therefore, this dissertation study examined parents' experiences in discovering, reporting, and living through the aftermath of their child being bullied. This study used a purposeful sample that was criterion-based. Nine mothers and one mother/father pair were tape-recorded using face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Follow-up phone interviews followed. Key themes and patterns were analyzed using the philosophical method of interpretive phenomenology based on Heidegger's philosophy of being. Exemplars were used to illuminate several themes.

Results suggest three unique stages. In the first stage, discovery, parents often noticed psychosocial changes in their child related to bullying. Parents often responded initially by providing advice to their children. When signs of their schoolchildren being bullied persisted, parents decided to report the incidents to school officials. Nine parents reported incomplete interventions that let their youths' victimization continue. One parent, a paradigm case, shared understandings of how her son's school official provided a full intervention that was restorative. However, all other parents who received an

incomplete intervention found themselves rethinking how to protect their children from bullying. In this aftermath, several parents moved their children out of the school into a new district or began to home school. However, half the parents were left unable to move their child and therefore could not provide protection. Indiana's anti-bullying law was unknown to eight parents and was unsuccessful in leveraging protection for one parent who used it with school officials as a threat. School official's responses to bullying were incongruent with student handbook procedures. Recommendations from a parent's perspective indicate school officials must: 1) have a clear process in place for parents to report, 2) follow through by calling parents back with results from investigating and procedures that will be taken to intervene, and 3) call the bullies' and victims' parents to notify what has occurred and what will be done to ensure safety. Discussed are implications for school officials, including social workers, and state policymakers.

Margaret E. Adamek, PhD, Committee Chair

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## CHAPTER I

“If adults are exposed to maltreatment or persecution, they generally have a good chance of getting help and protection from society. It seems only reasonable that young people be guaranteed a corresponding right.” (Olweus, 1978)

Being bullied at school is a relatively common childhood experience (Aalsma & Brown, 2008). It occurs in nearly every school throughout the world (Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin, & Patton, 2001). In middle school, up to three-quarters of young adolescents experience bullying, and up to one-third report more extreme experiences of coercion or inappropriate touching (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2001). Evidence suggests victims suffer higher psycho-social effects, such as low emotional adjustment, poor relationships with classmates, and low self-worth compared to the general school population (Eslea et al., 2003; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009). Results from a U.S. national survey of over 15,000 students, grades 6-10, suggest that 3,245,904 students are being moderately to severely victimized by bullies each school year (Nansel et al., 2001). Each school day, an estimated 160,000 U.S. students are absent from school due to fear of being bullied (Flynt & Morton, 2004).

Within this section, I will look at the definition of bullying for purposes of this dissertation. I will then frame the context of the multiple systems victims must navigate when bullying takes place (e.g., bully, parent, peers, teachers, school culture etc...). Each of these systems influences early adolescent bullying within a school setting. By considering these contextually relevant aspects of a victim's world, the dynamic of bullying can be better understood. Part of a clear understanding comes from what is meant by the definitional term *bullying*.

### *Defining Bullying*

It will be helpful to clarify common social science definitions of what is and is not bullying. Most school children who self-report bullying and victimization to researchers have used the Olweus Bully/Victim Revised Questionnaire. This widely used survey instrument is used in most bullying research studies, which contains the definition of bullying first, followed by specific acts of bullying (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 2001; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Pepler, Craig, Connolly, Yuile, & McMaster, 2006; Smith, Cowie, Ragnar, & Liefoghe, 2002, p. 1121; Smith & Gross, 2006; Unnever & Cornell, 2003a).

Throughout the social science literature, the term bullying has three legs on which it stands. Olweus (2003), who has guided much of the early research into bullying since the 1970s, includes these three criteria for bullying (See Appendix A for the complete Olweus bullying definition). First, Olweus (2003) states there must be “aggressive behavior or intentional ‘harm doing.’” Second, this “aggressive behavior or intentional harm doing is carried out repeatedly and over time.” Lastly, the interpersonal relationship is characterized by “an imbalance of power...occurring without apparent provocation” (p. 12). This definition creates distinguishing characteristics from other forms of violence. The intentional harm-doing suggests targeting an individual. The word “repeatedly” in the definition distinguishes the behavior from a singular incident of being teased, humiliated, or aggressed upon. Also, by acknowledging the imbalance of power, reciprocal aggressive acts or conflicts between parties of equally comparable strength are not considered bullying (Cornell, Sheras, & Cole, 2006; Nansel et al., 2001). However,



the Olweus (2001) definition is not the only one found within bullying research. Another way of defining this behavior is to say bullying is the action of establishing and maintaining social dominance through repeated overt aggression and that a victim does not have capacity to deflect attacks due to lack of skills, power, or social support (Arora & Thompson, 1987).

Definitions regarding bullying remain important because most bullying research is survey-based self-reports (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Sawyer, Bradshaw, & O'Brennan, 2008). Since operational definitions are needed for precise measurement of a particular phenomenon, it becomes important to make distinctions between bullying and other forms of school violence like harassment. Definitions are also important in our understanding of how the public defines a phenomenon compared to how scholars who define it for research projects.

In a qualitative study by Mishna and colleagues (2006), children and adults were found to generally understand the scholarly definition of bullying, yet often left out one of the three pillars: repetition. This part of the definition is important due to the associated “dread or fear of future occurrences” that intensifies a victim’s distress (Mishna, Pepler, & Wiener, 2006, p. 269). The fear of being re-victimized in the future would seem to bring about avoidance coping, such as skipping school or suicide.

Mishna (2004; 2005; 2006) provides data in which the patterns from the narratives of students, teachers, principals, and parents suggest that a bullying definition can be ambiguous for two reasons. Mishna (2004) used a similar definition to Olweus’ (1996a) questionnaire definition that was read aloud to five fourth and fifth grade

Canadian school students, their parents, teachers and principal. The definition read to participants in the study stated:

We say a student is bullied when another student or group of students says nasty and mean things to him/her or tease him/her a lot in a mean way. It is also bullying when a student is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, and things like that. These things may happen often, and it is hard for the student being bullied to defend him/herself. But it is not bullying when two students of about the same strength argue or fight. (p. 236)

Mishna discovered a gap can exist between the actual definitions of bullying and cognitive beliefs that an incident is bullying. For instance, if a teacher or student perceives “somebody constantly being picked on is doing something to cause it” then it may become cognitively processed as an act deserved and may not be considered bullying, even though the act can be defined as bullying (Mishna, 2004, p. 238). Second, there are blurred lines of bullying among friends (Cornell et al., 2006).

Mishna’s study reminds researchers that making assumptions about the definition of bullying may add to the complexity of understanding bullying. When parents, teachers, and children read a definition on bullying, then fill out standardized instruments to produce numerical indicators of significance, the gathered data may be reliable, but less than valid due to the context in which it occurs (Mishna, 2004). This omission of examining the quality of the relationship between the bully and friend/victim (Kyriakides, Kaloyirou, & Lindsay, 2006) complicates potential identification of a bully who may instead be classified as friend.

### *School Violence*

Harassment and bullying fit under an overarching umbrella of *school violence*. During the last 35 years, *school violence* has been defined as “any behavior intended to harm, physically or emotionally, persons in school and their property” (Benbenishty &

Astor, 2005, p. 8). In essence, *school violence* is an overarching term used to include students' and staffs' aggressive, hurtful acts towards another.

There are distinctions between bullying and harassment. Harassment often refers to verbal threats, hate crimes, and vandalism because it is considered an “overt, intentional act of aggression towards another person” (Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007, p. 42). It may not be repeated or have a power imbalance that is necessary for the definition of bullying. Harassment can take the form of using race, gender, sexual orientation, or characteristics that are personal to the victim and exploited by the attacker. An example may help clarify the difference between bullying and harassment: If a picture is posted of a targeted victim that is humiliating and hurtful—only once, by a younger, weaker aggressor, it may be considered harassment instead of school bullying. This is because all three criteria within the bullying definition have not been met (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007). Therefore, I will subscribe to Olweus' (2001) definition of bullying that states bullying is an intentional aggressive act onto someone who has less power to defend themselves and that the act of aggression is repeated.

#### *Why Should We Care*

From a social welfare policy standpoint, Ponsioen (1962) describes society's first duty is to take care of the *basic survival* needs of its citizens even on a social-emotional level. The *Code of Ethics* of the National Association of Social Workers (1999) states the unifying mission for the social work profession is to “help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” (p. Preamble). If we are to consider safety as a basic human need or right, then the act of bullying on an individual or group to

whom it is being targeted is a form of targeted oppression and social injustice. This form of aggression towards a victim is placed well within social work's DNA to address issues of social justice, self-dignity and worth, and integrity for individuals and groups who are vulnerable and being oppressed, who wish for change (National Association of Social Workers, 1999).

We now know the scope of bullying is a common plague that affects nearly every school throughout the world (Bond et al., 2001; Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2000). Researchers have witnessed school bullying occurring with children as young as 4 years or preschool age (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996). Although most of the research on bullying has taken place in Europe, Australia (Nansel et al., 2001), and Canada (Mishna et al., 2006), within the United States, the National School Safety Center referred to bullying as "the most enduring and underrated problem in U.S. schools" (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005, p. 101). Further, students who report being bullied once or twice show "highly significant differences" in psychosocial adjustment compared to students who report not being bullied (Smith, Talamelli, Cowie, Naylor, & Chauhan, 2004; Solberg & Olweus, 2003, p. 261). Absenteeism, loss of friends, depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic complaints are some of the outcomes for victims (P. Smith et al., 2004). The imprint of this form of violence seems to penetrate deeply into the victims' psyches.

Concern about bullying and being bullied has reached the level of the federal government. The U.S. Secret Service has recognized school bullies as possible future threats to top government officials (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). Bullying has been found to be a "strong risk factor" for later development of

psychopathological behaviors (Kim, Leventhal, Koh, Hubbard, & Boyce, 2006, p. 1041). This behavior can be acted out through extreme acts of violence. For the victim, or bully-victim (a child who is victimized by a bully and bullies others), links of extreme retaliation have been found. From 1992 to 1999, researchers reviewed 37 school shootings, conducted personal interviews with the perpetrators, and combed through their school records. Two-thirds of the attackers (41 individuals) had experienced bullying that was longstanding, severe and seemed to play a “major role” in motivating school shootings (Vossekuil, Reddy, Fein, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2000, p. 7). Many of the school shootings have roots in children being bullied with arguably unsuccessful adult intervention (Dorn, 2006). Making sure victims are responded to quickly and in a way that stops the bully from continued attacks can have school-wide and societal implications regarding the consequences of acting out hurtful behaviors (Perren & Alsaker, 2006).

The earlier an adult can successfully intervene the better the outcome for the bully and victim. Both bullying and being bullied at school are associated with key violence-related behaviors, including carrying weapons, fighting, and sustaining injuries from fighting (Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ruan, & Scheidt, 2003). Evidence from one longitudinal study suggests school children who were identified as bullies at age eight were six times more likely to have committed a serious crime as young adults, and, by age 30, were five times more likely to have had a serious criminal record compared to non-bullies (Olweus, 1993). This suggests that these *antisocial tendencies* seem quite stable from childhood to adulthood (Sourander et al., 2007; Woods & White, 2005).

With bullying behavior showing up as early as preschool, it would seem beneficial for society to institute early intervention efforts to intervene and alter the bully's life course.

### Context of the Problem

Being bullied often occurs within the school context. Benbenishty and Astor (2005) underscore the need for understanding the context in which violence occurs, particularly within the school, as a critical element to better understand parents' involvement. The context is multifaceted and adds to the complexity of the bullying experience. However, understanding the types of bullying that occur will be helpful when exploring contexts.

### *Types of Bullying*

Most forms of bullying behavior intend to result in outcomes of dominance and raised status among peers (Olweus, 1991). There are three types of bullying that occur in schools: verbal, physical, and relational (Olweus, 1993). The *verbal* component is considered a direct form of bullying; an open attack that is observable of bullying (Brown, Birch, & Kancherla, 2005; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006; Marini, Dane, Bosacki, & Cura, 2006; Olweus, 1993). It is seen as repeated hurtful attacks that may be in the form of name-calling, threatening, racial slurs, sexual harassment, or other uninvited verbal attacks. Verbal aggression is defined as "attacking the self-concept of another person instead of, or in addition to, the person's position on a topic of communication" (Meyer, Roberto, Boster, & Roberto, 2004, p. 452). These verbal attacks focus on "character, competence, physical appearance, and background" (Meyer, Allison, Reese, & Gay, 2004, p. 452).

In U.S. middle schools, male and female targets are most likely to receive verbal bullying (Cross, Pintabona, Hall, Hamilton, & Erceg, 2004; Liepe-Levinson & Levinson, 2005; Nansel et al., 2001; Whitney & Smith, 1993; Williams & Guerra, 2007). A Canadian study that reviewed individual vignettes with sixth and seventh graders found that when student bystanders witnessed bullying, the students rated verbal bullying situations as significantly more difficult to respond to compared to either physical or relational bullying (Henderson & Hymel, 2003). Dinkes and colleagues' (2006) report reveals verbal bullying is the most common form of bullying for both male and females, regardless of race, urban v. rural, or public v. private schools. This corresponds with other studies' findings (Fleschler, Peskin, Tortolero, & Markham, 2006; Smith et al., 1999).

Prevalence rates for being verbally bullied differ from study to study. Data obtained from a large U.S data set of sixth through twelfth grade students analyzed by Dinkes and colleagues (2006), found that 18.5% of males and 19.0% of females reported being verbally bullied within a six month time frame. Nansel and colleagues (2001) in comparison, used a large data set of U.S. students represented in sixth through tenth grades and found a much higher rate of frequently bullied students (once a week or more) who reported being verbally bullied. When including *belittled about religion or race*, *belittled about appearance or speech*, and *subjects of sexual comments or gestures* as verbal bullying, 46.1% of males reported these incidences occurring once a week or more, while 48.2 % of females reported such incidents. Nansel and colleagues (2001) may have higher percentages due to breaking down verbal bullying into these sub-categories that may not be mutually exclusive to verbal bullying. Dinkes and colleagues

(2006) in comparison used broad, general examples for students to respond to (e.g., Called you names or insulted you). These broader categories may make it more difficult for students to remember incidences compared to the more specific questions students responded to in the Nansel and colleagues (2001) study.

When middle school youth are verbally bullied regarding unchangeable personal features such as race or skin color, there is emerging evidence that physical violence may ensue. This reaction was found in an in-depth qualitative study conducted in Israel. The results suggest that the anger and humiliation that early adolescent children experience while being verbally attacked led to a strong desire to act out with physical aggression for both males and females (Geiger & Fischer, 2006). These findings imply school officials need to know that accepting or minimizing verbal abuse may allow a progression to occur, reinforcing the violence response pattern. A study by Meraviglia, Becker, Rosenbluth, Sanchez, and Robertson (2003) asked students what adults “usually do when a student calls another student mean names” (p. 1354). Thirty-five percent of students believed adults at school would tell students to just ignore the incident while less than 7% of staff reported that adults in the building would respond that way. This study suggests there is wide variance in perceptions between students’ and adults’ predictions about how adults will respond to their child being verbally abused.

The *physical* component, also a direct form, is the most easily observed form of bullying (Benbenishty & Astor, 2005; Cornell et al., 2006). Physical bullying is repeated attacks that involve punching, kicking, hitting, tripping, slapping, running into, spitting, or other physically painful acts that are uninvited by the victim (Campbell, 2005; Unnever & Cornell, 2004). Included in this form of bullying is the *threat* of violence,



either through words or gestures (Cornell et al., 2006). It is the second most common form of bullying (Williams & Guerra, 2007). Olweus (1978) states that the likelihood of using physical bullying is increased when physical weakness of the victim is perceived by the bully. In their U.S. data set, Nansel and colleagues (2001) found that 17.8% versus 11.1% of females reported being frequently physically bullied once a week or more (e.g., being hit, slapped, or pushed). In Dinkes and colleagues' (2006; see Appendix B) large U.S. sample, by combining the categories *threatened with harm* and *pushed, shoved, tripped and spit on*, 16.1% of males reported frequent physical bullying compared to 11.5% of females over a previous 6 month period. These results illustrate how asking similar questions with slightly different criteria of two different samples within the same country can result in similar findings. It also underscores how varying a question or questions can produce different results among studies. This makes it difficult to compare results. This underscores the need for systematic, inter-research fidelity in the field of school bullying.

Lastly, a third type of bullying that is an indirect (attacks carried out covertly) or subtle form of bullying is called *relational* bullying, sometimes referred to as social bullying. Relational bullying is the spreading of rumors by demeaning or punishing a person, or by excluding or isolating them from peers socially (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006; Marini et al., 2006; Olweus, 2001; Unnever & Cornell, 2004). This form of bullying often resorts to manipulation of friendship patterns (Cornell et al., 2006) and can often occur "via a third party" (Olafsen & Viemero, 2000, p. 57). Dinkes and colleagues (2006) found relational bullying to be the second most frequent form of bullying to occur in their sample, with a peak occurring in seventh grade and declining afterwards.

Combining two items from Dinkes' (2006, Appendix B) categories regarding relational bullying *subject of rumors* and *excluded from activities on purpose* demonstrates that 15% of males and 23.7% of females reported these forms of bullying occurring within the last six months. In comparison, Nansel and colleagues (2001) only asked if a student had been *subjects of rumors*. This resulted in 16.7% of males and 17.3% of females reporting this happening *frequently*. In both of these large-scale U.S. studies, female students from sixth grade and up report being exposed to relational bullying more often than males. Because this form of bullying is likely to leave no physical signs, it is important for a parent to be aware of emotional cues and behaviors that may result from this form of bullying.

*Cyber bullying* or virtual abuse, also a form of relational bullying, has become increasingly popular among middle school children (Keith & Martin, 2005; Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Cyber bullying is difficult to resolve in school since much of it is executed at home with the use of computer or cell phone technology, affording anonymity to the bully. Yet, the emotional trauma must be faced by the victim within the school, where adults typically have little to no idea of what has happened (Keith & Martin, 2005). Instant messaging, chat rooms, cell phone cameras, three-way calling, and other uses of technology can be used to disgrace and publicly humiliate by making a student's personal life public (Keith & Martin, 2005).

Out of all the forms of bullying, the newest and most likely to grow in usage is cyber bullying (Williams & Guerra, 2007). Female students in particular view cyber bullying as a problem that is rarely mentioned at school (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007). Further, there is evidence to suggest that students are unaware of how to respond

to online bullying, whether or not to help themselves or help a friend (Agatston et al., 2007). As a result, students are more likely to report cyber-bullying to parents than school officials, particularly if the bully is threatening in nature (Agatston et al., 2007). It seems that students are moving bullying from the school yard to cyberspace, and both parents and school personnel are still figuring out how to respond effectively (Worthen, 2007).

Adding to the confusion is the blurred distinction between on-line harassment and cyber-bullying (Wolak et al., 2007). The most widely accepted definition within the bully literature is Olweus' (2001), which includes aggression, repetition, and a power imbalance. Yet this same definition must apply if gathering information on this topic is to remain consistent, even for cyber-bullying (Wolak et al., 2007). Using a telephone survey of 1,500 internet users, ages 10 to 17 ( $M= 14.2$ ), Wolak and colleagues found that 9% ( $n=129$ ) of those surveyed said they had been harassed online within the last year (43% by a known peer(s) and 57% by someone they did not know in-person). Using Olweus's definition of bullying, only 46% percent of all who claimed being harassed online met the criteria for bullying. Wolak and colleagues (2007) suggest that it does not constitute bullying "unless it is part of, or related to, offline bullying" (p. 51-52). Otherwise, it should be considered "online harassment" defined as "threats or other offensive behavior, excluding sexual solicitation, sent online to the youth or posted online about the youth for others to see" (Wolak et al., 2007, p. 52).

A recent study explored electronic bullying with 3,767 middle school students from the northwestern and southeastern United States and used the Olweus Bully/Victim questionnaire (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Seventy-eight percent of students surveyed

had never been cyber bullied. However, 11% of students, all of whom were classified as *victims*, reported being electronically bullied once or more within a two month time period. Seven percent of the entire student group, classified as bully-victims, also reported being electronically bullied. In addition, the study revealed students' lack of knowing how to respond, even as a helpful bystander, when this type of bullying occurs (Agatston et al., 2007).

The means by which students reported most frequently being electronically bullied were through instant messaging, followed by chat rooms, email messages, and lastly, by website postings (Kowalski & Limber, 2007, p. 27). Additionally, electronic victimization rose slowly from 6<sup>th</sup> grade (8.3%), to 7<sup>th</sup> grade (12.1%), to 8<sup>th</sup> grade (12.2%). This may suggest that with maturity, more sophisticated and covert forms of bullying are used. In their study of 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 8<sup>th</sup> graders, Kowalski and Limber (2007) found that the frequency of females who have bullied someone in a chat room remains fairly stable (6<sup>th</sup> grade=1.25 to 8<sup>th</sup> grade=1.40 times), while males' frequency of chat room bullying shows an upward trend (6<sup>th</sup> grade 1.18 to 8<sup>th</sup> grade=1.65). This association was found to be significant at the univariate level when looking at grade and gender,  $F(12, 768) = 2.32, p < .007, \eta^2 = .04$ .

Kowalski and Limber (2007) also found that 6.4% of victims of electronic bullying had "not been involved with traditional bullying as victim..." (p. 27). This may be due to the ease electronic cyber bullying offers, especially regarding anonymity in delivering harm-doing. Bullies making threats or embarrassing accusations that they would not have done face-to-face further leaves victims blindsided (Keith & Martin, 2005; Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

The level of psychological impact to the victim from each type of bullying is currently unknown (Cornell et al., 2006). Cornell and colleagues suggest constructing measures that separate each type of bullying to examine the severity of emotional impacts. A study measuring such constructs could use a longitudinal perspective that not only measures emotional impacts but their duration from being victimized.

### *The Bullies*

Bullies may be of any race, SES, and religious background (Dinkes, Cataldi, Kena, & Baum, 2006). Bullying behaviors are consistently connected to peer relationships across black, white and Hispanic adolescents (Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007). Evidence that the majority of bullies are likely to be male as demonstrated in one major U.S. study by a ratio of nearly two to one (Nansel et al., 2001). However, there is debate whether earlier bullying studies were biased toward physical and verbal aggression, forms of aggression often found occurring more often than for females (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Therefore, the over inflation of males reporting themselves as bullies may have occurred while relational bullying, a form of bullying often used by females, may be less represented.

Bullies are likely to have a positive attitude toward aggression and therefore a propensity to bully others (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Pellegrini & Long, 2002). For middle school bullies, anger is found to be the strongest predictor of bullying (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999). Remarkably, the bully can be a popular, attractive, and a well liked leader among the classroom or grade cohort. However, there is a slow, deteriorating effect on the bullies' likability as maturation continues (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007; Espelage, 2001). This popularity, which is strong for some bullies,

may be a result of early adolescents rewarding aggressive behaviors (Rose, Swenson, & Waller, 2004), and may further explain why peers report that bullies are found to have nearly the same number of friends as non-bullies (Espelage, 2001). Sutton and Smith (1999) found that those nominated as bullies by their peers performed better on social cognition tasks than their friends who supported bullying, which may be helpful in explaining bullies as leaders of their peer group. Sutton and Smith believe “the more active ringleader-type bullies may use their skill to understand and manipulate the minds of supporters and their victims” (p. 106). Further, there is evidence that popular bullies use peer mentoring as a way to influence others to bully. Students who self-reported little or no bullying behavior at the beginning of a school year, who then spent considerable time with a bully, reported participating in an increased amount of bullying behavior onto peers by year’s end (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). This peer influence occurs similarly within male and female peer groups.

In an Italian study, female middle school students who bullied were found to use name-calling, teasing, rumors, rejection, and take personal belongings as their most common form of bullying. Males tended to use threats, physical harm, rejection, and name calling when bullying (Baldry, 1998). In a U.S. study, Nansel and colleagues (2001) found that males chose both verbal and physical acts on victims while females used verbal both taunting and sexual comments and rumors most frequently. This suggests that where bullying is concerned, males tend to use overt (i.e., direct) bullying where females may be more covert (i.e., indirect) (Hilarski, Dulmus, Theriot, & Sowers, 2004; Olweus, 2003).

When bullies are accused of acting out aggressively, they have a great capacity in deflect responsibility of their bullying behavior onto others (Cranham & Carroll, 2003). Yet behaviors initiated by the bully are likely to be intentional by using goal-directed aggression toward their victim as compared to other forms of aggressive acts like vandalism or assaults (Stein, Dukes, & Warren, 2007). It is the bully's perception of the goal-directed aggression that is unique—"it does not need any stimulus" (Stein et al., 2007, p. 273). This understanding of bullying was further illuminated by a grounded theory study that involved interviews with 10 Australian males and females, 14-16 years of age. The study revealed the inability of bullies to conform with the demands of complex social constructs, in essence "transposing the responsibility of their behavior onto the individuals they victimized" (Cranham & Carroll, 2003, p. 129). The perception from the bullies' standpoint is that the onus of responsibility is on the people who are expecting them to change or alter these behaviors (Cranham & Carroll, 2003). This may explain why bullies reported in Nansel and colleagues' (2001) study perceived school climate as poor ( $p < .001$ ). Instead of a social skills deficit, what bullies may be lacking is the "ability to appreciate the emotional consequences of their behaviors on others' feelings and to share in, and empathize with, the feelings of others" (Gini, 2006, p. 539; Olweus, 1996a).

Nansel and colleagues (2001) found differences in bullying when comparing urban to rural areas. Two to three percent fewer urban students reported participating in moderate level bullying. The gap widens further, 3-5%, between rural and urban youth when asked about ever bullying within the current school term (Nansel et al., 2001). This may be due to a number of factors. Rural youth may have a higher rate of repeated

exposure from bully to victim within a smaller school. Another hypothesis is rural adolescents' need for arousal; rates of acting out by the bully who live in rural areas may be triggered by boredom (Woods & White, 2005).

A subgroup between the bully and the victim has been found within the bullying dynamic. Individuals within this subgroup are found to be more intensely disliked, more volatile, and show extreme reaction patterns toward being bullied and bullying others. This subgroup is referred to as the bully-victim (Nansel et al., 2001).

### *The Bully-Victims*

The bully-victim, often referred to as a provocative, aggressive, or violent victim in the bully literature, is characterized by a combination of both anxious and aggressive reaction patterns (Brockenbrough, Cornell, & Loper, 2002; Olweus, 1993; Unnever, 2005). Olweus (1996a) describes as “more actively irritating, tension-creating, and restless, who often becomes aggregated into the data as a victim and then as a bully” (p. 137). Bully-victims have been shown to have the worst or equal to the poorest psychosocial functioning across all categories e.g., health, emotional adjustment, school adjustment, relationship with classmates, and alcohol use (Nansel, Craig, Overpeck, Saluja, & June Ruan, 2004). Olweus (2001) finds that this sub-group makes up 10 to 20% of the total victim group while others are finding this subgroup to be larger in making one third of victims. Further, bully-victims have been shown to have difficulty concentrating on tasks and can cause “irritation and tension” for others around them (Olweus, 1993, p. 33). Haynie and colleagues (2001) suggest that the bully-victim's behavior is more reactive, deregulated, and impulsive compared to regular bullies, therefore making them vulnerable for acting out and being targeted. Unnever (2005)



found from a study of 2,472 students from six middle schools in Virginia, that bully-victims were “substantially more proactively aggressive than pure victims” and “more reactively aggressive than pure bullies” (p. 165). This reactive aggression of the bully-victim may help explain findings that they are the most likely to carry a gun to school in comparison to bullies or victims (Nansel et al., 2004). Unnever (2005) underscores this with the warning that bully-victims may be particularly unpredictable because they can view aggression positively and have hostile attribution biases. It is clear that this group remains the most vulnerable and likely to act out provocatively towards other students (Olweus, 2003).

### *The Victims*

Roughly 30% of U.S. school children will be a victim of bullying at some time in their public school careers (Nansel et al., 2001). Two thirds of these victims will not respond in any violent, aggressive, or provocative way toward the bully. Evidence has emerged that suggests victims are more likely to be from cohesive but enmeshed families, with an over-controlling mother compared to non-victimized children (Berdondini & Smith, 1996). As early as kindergarten, observations of victims demonstrate general pro-social behavior, yet these children score significantly lower on assertiveness and leadership, while often being highly submissive (Perren & Alsaker, 2006). Early victimization found by Hodges and Perry (1999) predicted internalizing symptoms and peer rejection later in childhood. Using in-depth interviews with Finnish parents, Olweus (1996a) found a pattern that early in children’s development, victimized children were seen as being cautious and sensitive. This cautiousness and sensitivity may be alluring for a bully who wants a controllable target. As a result, these children may be

apprehensive to initiate conversation and demonstrate assertiveness (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). The submissive victim's message to the bully: I am "insecure and worthless" and pose no threat in return (Olweus, 1993, p. 32). The immediate result is that the victim experiences proactive aggression from the bully that inflicts pain and suffering. Therefore, the passive victim often feels stupid, ashamed, unattractive, and like a failure (Olweus, 1993). The young person who is being victimized navigates him or herself with less social support, often not having a single good friend (Olweus, 1993). Compounding this problem, victims of bullying are often perceived by peers as quieter and more withdrawn; therefore, they attract little attention from peers or adults. These children often begin to wrongly blame themselves regarding the threats and humiliation that are targeted onto them; they believe they are deserving of the abuse because of being weaker or inferior in knowing how to stop the aggressor (Sullivan, 2000). Consequently, victims often see the world as an "unsafe place" where they do not deserve to live (Sullivan, 2000, p. 38).

Evidence suggests being a victim early on in school not only increases the odds of continued bullying throughout a child's school career, but also increased likelihood of school avoidance as a result of being a victim (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996).

In a longitudinal study on early adolescence, Hodges and Perry (1999) found that victims' internalizing behaviors, physical weaknesses, and peer rejection contributed to the buildup of victimization over time. By middle school, the victims' identities can be well entrenched, while others' identity formation as victim may just be beginning. However, there are different variations on how victims may cope and respond to their victimization.

The victim in this situation of being bullied finds him or herself in a complex set of circumstances that must be deciphered into some kind of decision-making end: whether to report being victimized or remain silent and suffer. Part of this decision making is about whether or not seeking help with a bullying situation will result in a positive outcome (Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2004). Earlier studies have revealed victims often believe teachers and administrators do little to stop bullying; therefore, students may be hesitant to report (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Slee, 1994). Lack of popularity from peers coupled with a small or absent social support group contributes to the belief that reporting bullying to an adult will make retribution from the bully even worse (Newman & Murray, 2005). However, victims are more likely to report social support from teachers and parents as an important intervention compared to non-victims (Kilpatrick-Demaray & Malecki, 2003). Social support from both parents and classmates, especially during middle school, has been found in one longitudinal study to be a predictor for protection against anxiety, depression, social stress, sense of inadequacy, poor interpersonal relations and self-esteem--all emotional elements to being bullied (Kilpatrick-Demaray, Kerres-Malecki, Davidson, Hodgson, & Jacob-Rebus, 2005).

Rates of clinical depression in early adolescent victims have been found to be about three times higher than for the bully (Espelage, 2001). Also, the odds ratio of suicidal ideation for victims compared to non victims is 5.7 as reported from Finnish students (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Marttunen, Rimpela, & Rantanen, 1999). Although adolescent victims can and do choose to report victimization to parents, that does not

guarantee the bullying will stop. It does, however, provide a line of defense capable of impacting the outcome of further victimization (Kilpatrick-Demaray et al., 2005).

Another way of sub-typing victims of bullying has been found for children in secondary schools. Smith, Schneider, Smith, and Ananiadou (2004) found three categories of victims in secondary schools: escaped victims, new victims, and continuing victims of school bullying. An *escaped victim* would be a child that was bullied but no longer is bullied; he or she has escaped the role. Escaped victims were found to be “somewhat less well adjusted in the peer group than those who were not victims of bullying” (D. Smith et al., 2004, p. 578). Children who were *new* and *continued victims* often internally blamed themselves for being bullied while rating themselves high on the Peer Problems and Emotional Problems Scale. However, these three groups are differentiated by how they cope.

Two-thirds of escaped victims chose to talk to someone about the actual bully incident (P. Smith et al., 2004). Less than half of the new and continued victim groups did likewise. Instead, they tried ignoring the bullying, perhaps a less effective coping strategy. Escaped victims chose two different behaviors in exiting the victim role: They made an effort to find new or different friends or worked at elevating their status to become popular. This was seen as more effective coping than blaming themselves (P. Smith et al., 2004). The ability for some children to believe there is capacity to make social adjustments, seems instrumental for the victims’ ability to escape his or her position.

### *The Parents*

When early adolescent children are being bullied, he or she must decide if they will disclose the bullying to a parent or choose someone else perceived as more trustworthy (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Dittus, & Bouris, 2006). Parental attitudes towards and perceived reactions to bullying may influence the bullied child's decision to disclose to a parent (Glover, Gough, Johnson, & Cartwright, 2000). The child's belief that the parent can be effective in resolving the bullying can also be a consideration (Glover et al., 2000). Proactive parents, often through monitoring and managing, can plan changes within their child's peer group. Often, depending on developmental level and relationship with the parent, the child who is bullied will rely on other supports, such as peers.

Kilpatrick and colleagues (2005) studied adolescent perceptions of social support from an urban sample of Midwest sixth and seventh grade students. Social support from parents e.g., feeling cared for, esteemed, and valued, was found as a significant predictor of deterring clinical maladjustment. What Kilpatrick and colleagues' longitudinal study communicates is that there is "strong evidence that social support from parents is a salient factor in students' adjustment" or maladjustment in school (p. 702). These results suggest parents play a crucial role in the lives of their early adolescents and must not be discounted.

### *The Peers*

In general, middle school students, 55% in one large diverse U.S. sample, believe bullying is a moderate to serious problem at their school (Bradshaw et al., 2007). However, peers developmentally at this stage begin disconnecting from adult alliances

and transferring relational capital into peer relationships, a developmental process called secondary individuation (Blos, 1967). Peer support gains priority, yet it becomes difficult to implement. This is because a different set of criteria is used when decision-making takes place. There is much to lose when an early adolescent is being bullied and a friend or peer chooses to intervene. Although the friend or peer may not approve of the bullying, intervening may have negative social consequence. By the friend or peer using enabling or inaction strategies, students believe they can avoid becoming a future target of bullying (Henderson & Hymel, 2003). This helps explain why middle school students witnessing bullying chose the response of ignoring or doing nothing (Bradshaw et al., 2007). As friends or peers find themselves in this awkward position at school, adults may play a big part in intervening.

### *The Teachers*

Teachers, although on the frontlines of where bullying takes place, face obstacles in addressing bullying. Middle school teaching structures find students changing classrooms to meet a new teacher for each subject. These transitions in the school can impede students from experiencing stable teacher support (Kilpatrick-Demaray et al., 2005). Further, changing classes often can interfere with teacher awareness of problems such as bullying.

Leff, Kupermidt, Patterson, and Power (1999) found middle school teachers less effective in identifying bullying behavior than elementary teachers. This may be the result of a decrease in physical, overt bullying and an increase in more relational, covert bullying (Craig & Pepler, 2003). However, Bradshaw and colleagues found that middle school students reported physical bullying at a higher frequency compared to elementary

and high school students (Bradshaw et al., 2007). This may suggest that in middle school, teachers may be more likely to turn a blind eye to what is occurring in and out of the classroom.

With the newest form of bullying, cyber bullying, middle school teachers report not seeing it but acknowledge the belief it is occurring (Bradshaw et al., 2007).

Bradshaw and colleagues (2007) found that middle school teachers' under-reported bullying prevalence compared to student reports. Only 5.1% of the time did teachers report as much bullying occurring compared to students' self-reports of bully victimization (Bradshaw et al., 2007). Not only do teachers seem to believe it is occurring much less than students, but this may also indicate that middle school age students *truly do live in another world*, a world adults would likely find difficult to negotiate.

Although there may be an expectation of teachers intervening when bullying occurs, they also will need the training and skills to do so. Evidence suggests teachers are less likely to intervene on an adolescent's behalf when they perceive themselves as having deficient skills or training to intervene and may be less likely to step in on the victim's behalf (Crothers & Kolbert, 2004; Hoover & Oliver, 1996). Teachers' level of perceived efficacy for resolving bullying situations is predictive of their likelihood to intervene (Bradshaw et al., 2007). However, there is evidence that many teachers are not equipped to intervene effectively. Unnever and Cornell (2003b) found in most cases, students surveyed believe their teachers would not intervene to stop bullying. The authors conclude that students see bullying in their school as "a pervasive aspect of school culture and perceived their teachers doing little to stop it" (Unnever & Cornell,

2004, p. 384). In Bradshaw and colleagues' (2007) study, over half of students (51.7%) not only reported middle school teachers seeing bullying and not doing anything about it, they also conclude that when they do get involved, teachers made the situation worse (61.5%).

Bradshaw and colleagues (2007) found that when students do report bullying to a staff member at school, middle school staff were most likely to talk with an administrator, then refer to a guidance counselor or other school resource. Often, parents of the bully did not receive a call. This leaves a bully's parents to believe their child does not bully at school (Bradshaw et al., 2007). Further, this may also communicate to the bully that his or her behavior is not that serious. Lastly, the under reaction may give the bully a free pass to continue bullying, perhaps in a more covert way. This can be reinforcing the pessimism students feel about potential success in receiving effective help (Crothers & Kolbert, 2004).

Teachers' attitudes were demonstrated as exemplars in Mishna's (2004) study when teachers shared: "It's hard to know whether somebody constantly picked on is doing something to cause it" and "In some cases, victims thrive on being victims" (p. 238). Further adding to the victimization is that middle school teachers report a higher sense of using "aggressive retaliation" as an appropriate response to interpersonal threats (Bradshaw et al., 2007).

Lastly, teachers' passive reactions to children being bullied may encourage victims to remain silent and therefore, the victimization to continue in and out of class (Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Bradshaw found teachers are more likely to respond to bullying



when bullying is made clear by being “caught in the act” compared to when someone reports it to them second hand (Bradshaw et al., 2007, p. 378).

Despite the complexity over teachers responding to the problems of bullying, Crothers and Kolbert (2004) found both teachers and middle school students believed reporting bullying to either a teacher or parent, as being “most helpful” as an effective anti-bullying strategy (Crothers & Kolbert, 2004, p. 28). Therefore, the idea of empowering teachers to have the skills to intervene is important in the school context. Teachers are more likely to perceive they are effective in responding to bullying if they have bully-specific in-service skills training (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Hazler & Miller, 2001). This training also increases teachers’ ability to identify verbal and relational bullying that is part of the middle school bullying context (Leff et al., 1999).

Other variables impacting teachers’ decisions to intervene are external forces such as the building attitude or culture, which is often influenced administratively (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Yoneyama & Naito, 2003). Internal forces such as the teachers’ own understanding of what bullying is and what expectations are given to them to respond to victims can influence attitudes toward intervening on the victim’s behalf (Mishna, 2004). The teacher seems to be in the middle of several system demands, with complex decision-making having to take place in that environment.

### *The Administrators*

For administrators, academic achievement, and building support with teaching staff are the benchmarks on which priorities may be aimed, rather than social and emotional learning, and coherent, continuous staff bully prevention training. Administrators must also adhere to new or updated social policies that are ever

forthcoming (Dake, Price, Telljohann, & Funk, 2004). These demands are coupled with scarce resources that place administrators in a position to cut trainings and services for their school staff (Dake et al., 2004; Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999). These cuts may include anti-bully training (Dake et al., 2004; Limber & Small, 2003).

Administrators' decisions to cut anti-bullying services or programming may be partly due to their perceptions of school bullying being different than other school faculty and staff. Dornfeld-Januzzi (2006) examined building professionals in two suburban middle schools in the U.S. The sample contained five administrators, 97 teachers, six guidance counselors, and 19 paraprofessionals. Administrators as a group believed that bullying, by either male or female students, was less problematic in their schools compared to the other three groups. Administrators also ranked bullying prevention efforts in school as being less important compared to other matters e.g., No Child Left Behind, staff development, and student attendance (Dake et al., 2004; MacLeod, 2007). Principals from 378 randomly selected U.S. schools in this survey reported that "after the fact activities" like calling parents are a better means of reducing bullying than taking preventive measures (Dake et al., 2004, p. 384). Although administrators in the sample largely stated there would be no barriers to using a whole school approach anti-bullying program, they expressed a key barrier was a lack of priority relative to the other concerns they face. Perhaps if an anti-bullying program had a wider systemic function (e.g., school discipline and/or character development), administrators may perceive the program as a priority for implementation.

Administrators may be overlooking how bullying affects school attendance, academic achievement, teacher competence, public support for their school, and the

perception of school safety (MacLeod, 2007). Macleod (2007) found when analyzing policy for Illinois secondary schools, just over half of school administrators had a specific anti-bullying policy in place that included a definition of bullying and consequence to the behavior. However, the majority did not include interventions for the victim, bully, or bystanders. This is a concern for the continuation of victimization and continued harm doing by the bully and the surrounding cast.

### *Social Workers*

A middle school building having a full-time social worker providing direct intervention to children facing obstacles can clearly impact outcomes with children who face this developmental challenge of being bullied (Vreeman & Carrol, 2007). The unique role of the school social worker allows intervention by shaping school discipline and conduct codes regarding treatment of aggressive students (Cameron, 2006). This is important, as some forms of discipline can have the opposite intended behavioral effect (Cameron, 2006; Ford, 1997). As behavioral specialists, social workers attend to what is called *building needs*. These needs not only entail diagnostic work for special education identification, but also intervention work with students in need of emotional support, whether individually or in a supportive peer group. Also, as an extra set of eyes for the principal, social workers intervene by becoming a bridge to working with parents of victims or bullies, whether through home visits or parents coming to school (Garrett, 2001). The opportunity to intervene by providing direct intervention or referring the family for service holds open the possibility for intervention often mentioned in the bullying literature (Arseneault et al., 2008). Many anti-bullying programs acknowledge the missing link of parent involvement in middle school bullying (Olweus, 2003; Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2001). The social worker can pursue this and other actions of working directly with struggling students individually or in groups, supporting and training teachers and staff, creating and implementing school safety policies, and other related activities that can impact bullying behaviors (Hare & Rome, 1999).

*School Climate*

Strategies to prevent or minimize school bullying are tied to school culture and climate (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). The Search Institute, an organization that does research in youth development, resiliency, and prevention, found that in order for adolescents to develop properly in school, several socially constructed assets such as school support, safety, clear rules, consequences, boundaries, and programming are necessary ("Search Institute," 2006). Such constructs have been found to have a small but significant effect in reducing bully victimization (Ma, 2002). In this context, bullying, or school rules against bullying (or the bigger umbrella of school violence), are often implied in the words *provide a safe and caring environment* that may be in the school's mission statement or student handbook. Students and staff who want to create anti-bullying norms in the school may want to spend time developing a written bullying prevention policy that the class or school consent to and follow through on (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). This can have the effect of creating norms of solidarity that bullying is not cool, and therefore is unacceptable. However, how those words are modeled within the school environment become important. For example, if bullying is seen or reported to a school official, many variables including building ethos, community values on bullying, time, perception of seriousness, and training seem to be factors in how and when the problem of bullying is addressed. The principal and school staff must send a strong message that bullying is taken seriously and will not be tolerated (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

*School Building Ethos*

Every school building has a unique culture and value system that can be influenced by the surrounding community culture. Often schools can be places that reinforce power-dominant relationships through hierarchical and authoritarian structures, alienating modes of learning, high levels of regimentation, and dehumanizing methods of discipline (Yoneyama & Naito, 2003). School administrators are expected to create an acceptance or rejection of the outside community culture by how they create the rules, expectations, and then model and enforce them. These rules give a sense to all who function in the school about what is acceptable and what is not (Ford, 1997). Further, the school climate that is created has been shown to influence whether victims choose to report being bullied (Unnever & Cornell, 2004). Therefore, middle schools with a positive disciplinary climate and “strong parental involvement” were shown to have students who reported fewer incidents of bullying (Ma, 2002, p. 81).

We also know that where school officials (and teachers) physically place themselves in monitoring hallways, bathrooms, lunchroom and playgrounds and how they monitor areas considered to be *hot spots* for bullying can impact the incidence of bullying (Astor, Meyer, Benbenishty, Roxana, & Rosemond, 2005). Also of interest is the way classroom environments are maintained (Kilpatrick-Demaray et al., 2005). Middle school classroom environments that maintain social support through supervised activities like learning groups that encourage teamwork and interpersonal contact with others create a buffer to school maladjustment (Kilpatrick-Demaray et al., 2005). Therefore, the community outside of the school as well as the community within the

school are unique parts of a socially constructed culture that plays a part in acceptance, rejection or tolerance of bullying (Unnever & Cornell, 2004).

### *Diminishing Supports*

Several risk factors in early adolescence can increase the likelihood of becoming a victim of bullying. This is part of the context that must be considered when viewing parent intervention. Social risk factors include lack of a small or supportive network of friends and having a rejected status among peers (Bollmer, Milich, Harris, & Maras, 2005; P. Smith et al., 2004). However, the quality of friendship and relationships of peers account for some protection from victimization. Bollmer and colleagues (2005) surveyed 99 U.S. parents and their children about their perceptions of the youth's friendships, victimization, and behaviors. Having an overall high quality friend during early adolescence lessened the likelihood of being targeted by a bully. This seems to suggest that if the student has one quality friend, perhaps they have the skill in friendship making whereas a youth without a close friend may not. Regardless, the child that is being victimized seems to have few social supports to adequately be protected from ongoing bullying (Bollmer et al., 2005; Olweus, 1993).

As middle school is sometimes referred to as the "brutalizing period," students begin to reassess their involvement in sticking up for a peer's bullying behaviors (Pellegrini & Long, 2002, p. 722). For instance, Henderson and Hymel's (2003) study of 140 Canadian middle school students found it becomes less desirable in early adolescence to get involved in assisting a peer victim than in previous developmental stages. This avoidance to stand up to the bully was found in part to be about avoiding one's own victimization (Henderson & Hymel, 2003; Olweus, 1993). A qualitative study

by Cranham and Carroll (2003) suggests a diminished shift in empathy occurs while the attitude of having a friend or peer just “deal with the problem” can become an overriding theme (p. 126). This was demonstrated in Graham and Juvonen’s (1998) study of middle school students who were asked to write down why some kids “get picked on a lot” (Graham & Juvonen, 2001, p. 58). In looking at student perceptions’ of attributes of their peers, they found one-third of students related getting picked on to the aggressor or school environment (external and uncontrollable), e.g., “Some kids think it’s funny to hurt others” and “This school has a lot of tough kids”(Graham & Juvonen, 2001, p. 58). The remaining two-thirds of the middle school sample reported on characteristics that made them likely targets. The sample reported kids are picked on a lot because of circumstances that are controllable by the victim. That is to say by “showing off, being a tattle tale, or bad mouthing others” were perceived as inviting retribution (Graham & Juvonen, 2001, p. 59). These perception traits fit well with the bully-victim, who is provocative in response to bullying, and who receives the least amount of social support in and out of school.

There were characteristics students perceived as uncontrollable. For example, 24% of the sample perceived “Physical unattractiveness, being different, and being unpopular or uncool” were attributes as being causes for victimization. The other 24% of the sample reported their perception that peers become victimized due to physical traits from being “younger, weaker, or unable to defend him or herself” (Graham & Juvonen, 2001, p. 59). This corresponds very closely to the bullying definition (see Appendix A) set forth by Olweus (1993) and later modified to its current form (Olweus, 2001). Graham and Juvonen (2001, p. 59) seem to be suggesting from these study results that



early adolescents assumed over half of the victims (52%) were picked on because they deserved it because they are perceived as “responsible for their plight” because the attacks are perceived as “controllable by the victim.” Therefore, friends or peers who would have risked intervening on the victim’s behalf in elementary school may be unwilling to take this risk in middle school. Instead, that possible defender begins to assess his or her own self-interests and personal concerns (e.g., safety or protection from the bully) within their social contexts (Henderson & Hymel, 2003). This loss of peer support in the middle school experience may actually increase the need for parents to play an advocacy role in their child’s victimization experience.

### *Group Dynamics*

It seems that bullying in middle school can be somewhat of a crowd-pleasing event, depending on what role one takes. Often, the school experience has different stages where bullies perform in front of an audience. In a nationwide survey of adolescents, of those students who had reported being bullied in the last six months, 79% reported bullying taking place inside of schools, 28% reported bullying taking place outside on school grounds, and 8.1% reported being bullied on the school bus (Dinkes et al., 2006). No matter where bullying happens, almost all children, regardless of social class, play a role in the bullying dynamic as it occurs with only a minority of students considered uninvolved (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). In their Australian study of 200 early secondary students, Rigby and Johnson (2006) found “over 90% of respondents indicated an awareness of peer victimization occurring in the presence of bystanders” (p. 436). Other studies indicate bullying occurs 85% to 88% of the time in a social context in which peers are present as observers (Craig

& Pepler, 1995; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Therefore, when considering anti-bullying strategies, schools can acknowledge that although it is a minority of students who may be doing the bullying or being victimized, the whole group must be considered (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Cranham and Carroll (2003) conducted a grounded theory study with ten 14 to 16 year old Australian students, and found when bullying occurs in schools, the victim/bully dynamic often has a supporting cast. This cast is based on “broad complex social constructs” (Cranham & Carroll, 2003, p. 128). These constructs determine middle school student behavioral expectations within the context of the school; if students follow their role properly, the group rewards them. If, however, they deviate, they risk isolation, exclusion, and bullying.

*The cast.* Olweus (2001) offers a conceptual scheme of the bully/victim/bystander dynamic that shows reaction roles to acute bully group dynamics (see Appendix C). The roles may shift, even for the bully, as group dynamics shift within the school day (Horne, Stoddard, & Bell, 2007). This cast of actors takes on different roles while also having different roles assigned to them creating in essence a collective character (Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Bertz, & King, 1982). This cast of peers was found to be involved in 87% of bullying episodes (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Gini, 2006; Olweus, 2001) through either being actively engaged or looking on passively. Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman and Kaukianen (1996) studied 12-13 year old male and female Finnish students who answered a Participant Role Questionnaire regarding specific behaviors about themselves and their peers within certain bullying situations. Student responses were placed in several categories to assist in understanding the group dynamic of bullying. Salmivalli et al. (1996) used peer classroom nominations and found

87.3% of all students in the sample fit into specific categories. The 573 students placed themselves in several participant roles. The researchers found the following distributions: 8.2% of the sample qualified as bullies while 11.7% were Victims. Students who qualified as bystander include 6.8% as Assistants (those who spur the bully on and join in with the bully), and 9.5% as the Reinforcers (those who encourage the bully by observing and laughing). About one-quarter qualified as Outsiders, 23.7% (those who are in the area but either avoid involvement or are not aware of the bully situation). Lastly, 17% saw themselves as defenders (those students who come to the aid of the victim). A small percentage, 12.7% of the total sample, reported playing no role (Salmivalli et al., 1996). This gives a clear picture that when facing a bully, there is often a collective of peers that plays out various roles (Salmivalli, 2001). Therefore, it is not just the bully the victim is facing, but also the assistant and reinforcer, those who “diffuse responsibility” to reduce their feelings of guilt (Salmivalli, 2001, p. 400). This effect of perceived powerlessness and feelings of desperation are aspects of being the victim in a bully dynamic (Salmivalli, 2001).

The most differentiated finding in this study was “the statistically higher significant sex differences” in how males and females responded while being in the bully dynamic (Salmivalli et al., 1996, p. 5). Although victimization was similar (11.8% for males and 11.5% for females), the difference in bullying showed greater variance with 10.5% of males and 5.9% of females self-reporting themselves as bullies. When looking at the roles, more males (12.2%) reported being the bully’s assistant in this sample than females (1.4%). The participant role of the *Reinforcer* showed the greatest percentage variance with 37.3% of males and 1.7% of the females reporting participating in this role.

The above-mentioned categories are important in that they all are pro-bullying categories that impact group dynamics and suggest a higher level of male involvement within the Finnish school environment (Sutton & Smith, 1999). This has implications regarding cultural implications of gender that may be a strong predictor in how one participates of the bullying dynamic.

Important gender distinctions were also found within this group dynamic.

Salmivalli and colleagues (1996) report that of female students in the study, 40.2% reported themselves to be *Outsiders* when someone was being bullied compared to 7.3% of males. *Defenders* of the victim, 30.1% of females and 4.5% of males, reported they were willing to take an active effort in stopping the bullying (Salmivalli et al., 1996). This illustrates the apprehension males have in disrupting the bullying. Another finding is that as children get older, they are less likely to provide support on the victim's behalf (Henderson & Hymel, 2003; Menesini, Codecasa, & Benellie, 2003). However, females consistently give more support to victims compared to males (O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999). One study found an overall drop among Canadian students as bystander in intervening from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (22%) to 6<sup>th</sup> grade (10%) (Abound & Miller, 2007). This suggests that as students advance developmentally, their thoughts, feelings, and actions change about how they assess risk regarding intervening. In conclusion, although levels of involvement change for "sticking up" for the victim when entering middle school, being liked and having a network of peers during this time has been shown to be a protective factor for being bullied (Bollmer et al., 2005; Pellegrini & Long, 2002).

## Middle School and Development

There is little doubt that developmental differences must be taken into account as a child progresses from grade to grade and from latency to early adolescence (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). *Adolescence* is derived from the Latin meaning *growing up*--the transition from childhood into an adult (Gleitman, 1991). Early adolescence seems to be the negotiating of the transition and all the associated complexities, including middle school.

The term early adolescence began to replace the previously held term preadolescence in the early 1970's with Kagan and Cole's publication of *Twelve to sixteen: Early adolescence*. The term further gained credibility when Thornburg began a journal in the early 1980's focusing on this age group, titled the *Journal of Early Adolescence* (Manning, 1993). Although there is variance in what may be the exact age span of this *early adolescent* period, it has taken on ages in between elementary and high school, typically 12 to 16 years of age (Thornburg, 1983).

There are documented signs of hesitation in approaching this group of early adolescents. Historically, researchers have been hesitant to engage this age group (Manning, 1993). For instance, between 1926 and 1974, fewer than 50 books or articles focused on that developmental uniqueness of this age span (Thornburg, 1983). Another unique characteristic about this period of life is that developmental changes occur differently for both males and females. This time of early adolescence can be marked by rapid physical transitions in height, weight, and body proportions and characteristics (Lerner & Galambos, 1998). Although much is to be made out of hormonal changes, it is often the cognitive processing that not only becomes faster and more efficient, but

intensified (Lerner & Galambos, 1998). This intensity can affect early adolescents' views of themselves.

One important developmental task for the early adolescent is the greater emphasis on peer relations—a shift away from the allegiance and affiliation to parents and teachers (Manning, 1993). Students beginning middle school in latency stages of development, according to Erikson's psycho-social development, are said to be securing their personal sense of competence versus inferiority (Gleitman, 1991). This sense of competency is accomplished for the early adolescent by finding oneself productive, able to succeed and complete tasks, competent in physical and intellectual abilities, and in the social world of acceptance and recognition by peers (Dziegielewski, 2007). For the victim of a bully, the internalization of being rejected, unable to use skills to successfully escape or defend oneself successfully could thwart, delay, or change psycho-social development by internalizing a sense of inferiority during this transition time.

Zeedyk and colleagues (2003) found from surveying participants from Scotland and England, that 192 final year primary students, 128 first year secondary students, 119 parents, and 11 primary and 19 secondary teachers listed a hierarchy of concern during this transition time. Every participant category reported their highest concern to be bullying. First year secondary students, teachers, and parents all reported bullying to be the first choice about school that "worried children" even to a greater frequency than primary students, parents, and teachers. This escalation of reported worry from participants who are actually involved in secondary school suggests the reality is even worse than the anticipated experience beforehand.

### *Self-Blame*

In early adolescence, it is important to understand victimization and attributes that led to being victimized. As attachment changes towards peers and away from the parent, there is also an intense comparison regarding identity--how one compares with other peers (Davies, 1993). Erikson's ego identity versus role confusion becomes a developmental task of early adolescence. The strong surge of egocentrism contributes to development of a personal fable: a belief that one's feelings, abilities, and problems are unique, unlike anyone else. The internalization of when the victim of a bully is alienated and cast out of a peer group or is being persecuted by a bully with perceived power, one can understand how a victim blames himself or herself, withdraws, and questions their sense of belonging. Although an outcome in this stage is to integrate this image of oneself as a unique person (Dziegielewski, 2007), the psychosocial consequences from being bullied may continue to freeze that child into the role of victim as the unique person. Some evidence is provided to underscore this phenomenon.

Graham and Juvonen (1998) studied self-blame in 400 middle school children from sixth to seventh grade examined how students used attributions of early adolescents to explain harassment from their peers. Forty of the students' self-reports fit the criteria for victimization, while 140 of the sample were used as a non-victim peer comparison. The researchers were interested in finding which of four attributions victims would apply to their own victimization: 1. Characterological self-blame (e.g., "If I were cooler this wouldn't be happening to me."); 2. Behavioral self-blame (e.g., "I should have been more careful"); 3. Threat from others (e.g., "These kids pick on everybody"); and 4. Passivity (e.g., "I would be quiet") (Graham & Juvonen, 2001, p. 55).

Results indicate that victims, compared to non-victims, significantly endorsed more characterological self-blaming related to incidents of being harassed by peers. A path analysis revealed a relationship between self-reports of victims who had traits of loneliness and anxiety (traits found in victims of bullying) that were explained by characterological self-blaming attributions of the victim. This analysis led researchers to conclude that the victim's status frequently led to characterological self-blame, and subsequent psycho-social maladjustment (Graham & Juvonen, 2001). In addition, victims were more likely to endorse feeling helpless when threatened by peers, which is linked to the behavioral response of passivity. There was no difference found between victims and non-victims in applying self-blame to being victimized, suggesting all early adolescents in the sample blamed themselves, to an extent, for being harassed by a peer (Graham & Juvonen, 2001).

When considering these results, self-blame is often about self-inadequacy, something perceptually amiss in one's character that justifies one's victimization, i.e., "it must be something about me." This is an important point regarding connecting this phase of development to middle school. If this period of development, as Erikson suggests, ego identity versus role confusion, moves the early adolescent socially toward peers and forms personal identity, the "*Who am I,*" then the feedback constructed by bullies onto victims allows for the risk of an identity formation to be compromised--something less than desirable (Gleitman, 1991). If the classroom and the school are to be centered on every child's well-being, teachers and administrators will have to be diligent in creating a school environment that promotes and protects psychosocial development for early adolescent students (Manning, 1993). However, when considering parents responding to



their child being bullied, it becomes understandable how adolescents may defer reporting to a parent believing if they were bigger, stronger, smarter, better looking, more social, or had better peers to hang out with, they would not be targeted for bullying. Therefore, further research could be useful in adolescent decision-making in placing blame. By reframing the bullying behavior as being the fault of the bully, not the victim, and by using those constructs in teaching potential victims of bullying new strategies in responding to bullying, there may be a creation of empowerment for the victim (Berry & Hunt, 2009).

### Significance

The importance of understanding parents' experiences rests on several fronts. First, the magnitude of the effect this problem of being bullied is having on parents of children who are bullied is unclear (Benbenishty & Astor, 2005; Mishna et al., 2006). Therefore, in-depth study will provide a useful account of understanding parents' experience in confronting this problem within middle school officials.

Second, by policymakers hearing the lived-experiences of what occurs when parents take action on behalf of their child, they may better understand what needs to be included or excluded in constructing legislation.

Third, it gives school officials the unique perspective of vicariously placing themselves on the other side of the desk in the guest seat. Such narratives can provide school officials insights on what occurs before the initial contact by a parent, the actual reporting, and the experience parents are left with afterwards. A phenomenological study is needed for understanding what is occurring within the parent's journey. Therefore, this research study stands to inform school officials what a parent who experiences a

successful intervention has understood as a practice that restores functioning. This may lend a pathway for school officials to improve their steps when approaching reported bullying.

Fourth, this study can provide social workers and other school professionals insight on parents' expectations and how best to implement interventions when the problem of victimization becomes known, even by proxy. Because social workers are trained in person-in-environment issues, it would seem likely that social workers could use this study to assess the school environment to better address parents' needs for safety and support for their child.

Fifth, this study, depending on the results, can give parents of middle school age students an understanding of the process of navigating their child's school system. There may be clues revealed about properly responding to this challenge that may lead to positive results for the child. Therefore, as the parent must navigate this process, this study may serve as a blue print. Lastly, this can give parents validation that their experience may not be unique or very different (universality) from other parents who decided to take action by reporting bullying at their child's school (Yalom, 1985). It can then be a form of social support and validation that can guide parents in formulating the "now what" part of their intervention.

#### Topic Formation

In light of the qualitative nature of this dissertation, it is necessary to be reflexive and share underpinnings of beliefs that influence decisions relating to the study formation. It is important to inform the reader of my connection to this topic area. Early in my PhD education, I was intrigued in doing an intervention strategy for victims of

verbal bullying. As my thinking continued, so did my openness to what other possibilities exist for a dissertation. A shift towards the topic of parents interacting with a school official came in 2006-2007 through a series of conversations with some parents who began sharing about their experiences of reporting bullying to school officials. Three of the conversations were with university professors from two different universities; another occurred with a beautician. I did not solicit their stories; rather, they were shared because I mentioned my interest in studying school bullying. I also consulted with Dr. Faye Mishna, Social Work Professor at the University of Toronto, Canada regarding my topic area. Dr. Mishna has done qualitative work on parent, elementary children, teachers, and principal's perceptions of bullying. Our phone conversation led me to believe that I was on the right track and needed to continue with this topic area that it is in fact, "worth knowing" (Patton, 2002, p. 573). As my literature review will reveal, little has been done with early adolescents, particularly when looking at parents reporting to school officials in the context of newly developed anti-bullying laws that the majority of states now have in place.

I would like to propose that there is a population of parents who have children who enter middle school and find out during the course of their child's journey that he or she is being bullied. During that time, a parent may respond by: A) minimizing the bullying to themselves and their child, B) encouraging their child to fight back, C) calling or going in to the school to report the bullying to a school official, or D) none of the above. Within the current published studies on bullying, option C has been explored with Australian parents of kindergarteners (Humphrey and Crisp (2008), but not middle school parents in the U.S. What happens as a middle school parent takes the risk of reporting?

What is the lived experience of parents who report to middle school officials their child is being bullied? The act of a parent responding to the perceived needs of their child's safety takes place in a context, with many issues that are part of the experience. The term bullying itself may be unclear to parents or even to school administrators, who may use the term interchangeably with other forms of violence.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

On a scholarly level, little is known about the situations parents find themselves in when they realize their child is victimized by means of bullying. Mishna and colleagues (2006) argue that the literature lacks “an examination of the impact of a child’s victimization or bullying behavior on the family” (p. 273). Benbenishty and Astor (2005) argue that “one of the most important perspectives that should be added to studies of school violence is that of the students’ parents” (p. 163). Their research with students, teachers, and principals reveals that at several Israeli schools, parents entered schools to verbally and physically attack those who they believed were doing violence to their child (Benbenishty & Astor, 2005). Benbenishty and Astor (2005) conclude, “We believe, therefore, that this neglected area of research can help us understand better how parents, a critical element of the school context, interact with the school on issues of violence” (p. 163).

Middle school youth child may be skeptical of adult interventions (Mishna & Alaggia, 2005). Part of this skeptical nature may be the youth’s perception of adult strategies lacking effectiveness (Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000). Therefore, parents may discover the harm of bullying through monitoring.

#### *Parent Monitoring*

For a parent, the discovery of one’s child being bullied can occur in several different ways. First, through parental *monitoring*, parental awareness of the child becomes intentional. Monitoring is defined by Terrean-Miller (2006) as “any behavior utilized by parents in order to become aware or maintain awareness of what a child is

doing, where a child is, or what changes have occurred in the child” (p. 52). Monitoring becomes active when parents respond to their child’s behavioral changes, rips in clothing, negative messages about their child, or deterioration of schoolwork. These all can be clues that their adolescent child is being bullied by another student (Olweus, 1993). Through monitoring, a parent assesses what is occurring differently for the child, or whether the child feels trapped or distraught about the bullying. However, in the assessment, parents may use rationalizing behavior even when confronted with evidence of harm toward their child. Mishna and colleagues (2006) found evidence of this using qualitative interviews with Canadian parents and 4<sup>th</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> grade school children, one of whom showed up from school with a ripped shirt and bloody lip. The mother of the victim explained, “It’s really hard to gauge what’s an exaggeration” (Mishna et al., 2006, p. 269). The scenario underscores how parents may not believe their child is truly in harm’s way from a bully, even when there is evidence that suggests severe bullying. This further complicates issues of reporting bullying to a parent who may doubt the seriousness of these psychosocial stressors (Mishna et al., 2006).

#### *Confounding Issues for Parents*

When parents monitor their child, the assessment of abuse given to their child from bullying may be compromised through through personal definition of bullying often leave out the word *repeated*. (Mishna et al., 2006). When parents were confronted with a bullying situation with their child, if a parent did not consider an incident bullying, whereas the child did, the results showed the child may be left not only being bullied, but minimized or invalidated by the parent’s reaction (Mishna, 2004).

A parent's assessment of the bullying can further be complicated by the weighing of who may be at fault. Mishna (2004) found a prevailing pattern of parents weighing how much bullying is being done by their child and how much is being done by the friend. Depending on a parent's personal definition of bullying, the bullying incident may fall within the "normal" range for the parent. That is to say, the parent may view the bullying as typical for their child (Mishna, 2004).

Another factor that may cause confusion in assessing bullying is when the bully is someone they consider a friend. Bullying by a friend may confuse the problem of power, or abuse of power, in the friendship. For example, when a child who bullies hits a friend repeatedly, the child receiving the hits may feel confused if that person *is my friend* (Mishna, 2004, p. 239). Mishna has found both parent and child confusion to such responses. Although the parent may identify their child repeatedly being physically or emotionally bullied, the child may insist that no bullying is occurring due to perceived importance of the friendship (Mishna, 2004). Parent decision-making therefore, can be confusing. However, by parent monitoring, if the assessment of danger is made, and the parent believes the escalation of violence may increase, a shift toward *parent managing* can be helpful in providing limitations of peer contact with the bully, at least when out of school.

### *Parent Managing*

Once a problem is detected and deemed serious to a child's health, parental (peer) management can be used as a strategy for protecting the child. Tilton-Weaver and Galambos (2003) list the four categories of parent behaviors:

*Guiding* (communicating standards, values, expectations for and consequences of friendships), *supporting* (encouraging specific friendships and activities for preferred peers), *prohibiting* (communicating disapproval for particular peers or prohibiting contact with those peers), and *neutrality* (parents allowing adolescents to make own friends and choices). (p. 271)

The parental function of managing could then extend to an appointment with the school principal to discuss protection from bullying. However, Olweus (1993) warns of the overprotective attitude regarding managing on the part of the parent. An “overprotective parent can increase the child’s isolation from peers” and increase attachment to adults (Olweus, 1993, p. 104). However, leaving a child in harm’s way is also an extreme (Dorn, 2006). Being assertive as a parent and demanding a child remain safe while at school seems to not be far reaching or damaging to a child’s relational progression. There are other ways a parent may rely on discovering a child is being bullied.

#### *Disclosing to a Parent*

In one Midwest study, the likelihood of middle school youth telling a parent about being bullied was found to be over 50% (Terrean-Miller, 2006) and just over 60% in Canada (Charach, Pepler, & Ziegler, 1995). However, the Midwest study found that although over half of the parents knew of their child being bullied, 85% did nothing to intervene, at least not to the awareness of the bullied child (Terrean-Miller, 2006). The literature suggests a child’s ability to perform voluntary self-disclosure is based on several factors. In some family situations, the adolescent’s external assets are strongest when family life provides love and support, shown through positive communication (Papini & Farmer, 1990). The attribute of trustworthiness is important to an adolescent’s decision to self-disclose to a parent. When a young person thinks “their parents give



good advice, are trustworthy, and are not too busy for them...” (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2006, p. 1231) they are more likely to report being intentionally harmed.

Guilamo-Ramos and colleagues (2006) completed a study with a randomly chosen sample of mother/adolescent dyads chosen from a New York City phone book. The sample consisted of 75% Latino and 25% African American. The actual participants were 79% Latino and 21% African American dyads. Out of the original 820 families selected for the study, 18.5% of the sample was unwilling to participate, leaving a total of 668 dyads. Fathers were excluded due to the overall difficulty of male recruitment and limited economic incentives offered by the researchers. Mothers were paid \$30 while the early adolescent received \$20 for participating. Questionnaires were used with a five point Likert scales and were piloted for language translation and internal consistency. The three scales used had alpha coefficients for parent expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility of .72, .82, .73 for adolescents and .70, .68, .70 for mothers. Although these coefficients were less than “excellent” or “good,” they were considered acceptable (Rubin & Babbie, 2005, p. 186). It is important to note the researchers did not specify how many questions per survey were used. The lower the number of items on a survey, the greater allowance for lower alpha scores (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). Findings suggest children who perceive parental trustworthiness also perceive their parent as having “expertise” (p. 1242). It is important to note that the opposite may not be true: Parental expertise does not translate into trustworthiness; therefore, a bullying problem may be difficult for adolescents to disclose (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2006). The authors capture the essence of advice and parent credibility: “parents present their advice in a respectful and empathic way that engenders trust and understanding on the part of the adolescent,

then losses in credibility as a result of providing counter-desired advice and information can be minimized” (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2006, p. 1242). Although not as clearly defined, advice of this sort was found early as 1957, when Friedman reported that the parent of an adolescent “must not intrude upon his son or daughter, but stays quietly in the background, ready to give support and help as they are needed” (p. 28). Parents who show respectful, empathic responses and demonstrate understanding toward the adolescent gain credibility (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2006). There is a growing recognition that parents of teens do require support, especially the “substantial minority” who are experiencing difficulty during the “storm and stress” period of transition (Henricson & Roker, 2000, p. 763).

Finkenauer, Engels, and Meeus (2002) found that early adolescent youths who reported to their parents distressing situation were seen as protecting their own well-being. The findings were illuminated by a sample of 227 early adolescents who revealed that although secrecy is associated with emotional autonomy, keeping secrets from parents can compromise their physical and psychological well-being (e.g., depression). This may result from adolescents’ emotional separation from parents while having to deal with the intense feelings of insecurity that can emerge as a consequence (Finkenauer et al., 2002). Parents’ reactions specific to bullying are perceptually relevant to an adolescents’ assessment to disclose. For instance, 20% of parents in one study were found to encourage their child to fight back against the bully, while 44% of the students sampled believed their parents would go to school and talk to an official (Glover et al., 2000). Finkenauer and colleagues (2002) seem to suggest that instead of all-or-nothing parental support or complete separation, levels of separation are important with an *as*

*needed* pathway for the early adolescent to reengage the parent when necessary. Glover and colleagues (2000) underscore the trust a child has towards a parent's reaction to the news of being bullied, which factors into the assessment process of victims to disclose. In other words, there are many variables that lead to a child's decision on when and when not to disclose as well as to whom the bullied child discloses to.

In another look at disclosing bullying, a study of 2,437 middle school children from a metropolitan area in Virginia found 898 were bullied. Researchers found the victims were less likely to report bullying to a parent if the parent used coercive child-rearing techniques (Unnever & Cornell, 2004). The authors suggest that asking for help in a family that condones aggression may be used against the child as being weak. The study also found that victims were more likely to tell an adult over peers if they were "in lower grades, chronically bullied, and if their parents did not use coercive child rearing techniques" (Unnever & Cornell, 2004, pp. 383-384). In Unnever and Cornell's aggression model, these three variables explained .169 of the total variance in a likelihood ratio test (Chi-square  $R^2$ ). When middle school youth reported the bullying to an adult, the gender coefficient was significant (.669,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore, the odds of a male student reporting being bullied was two-thirds that of a female student (Unnever & Cornell, 2004). These authors suggest future research focus on how parents advise their children to cope when bullied and how they further support or detract from their child seeking help.

Unnever and Cornell (2004) also suggest studying how "the attitudes and practices of school authorities affect student willingness to report being bullied" (p. 386). This argument gets support from Glover and colleagues' (2000) British study of 4,700

students, ages from 11-16. Thirty percent of the student sample believed their parent had previously reported bullying to a school official (Glover et al., 2000). The percentage of parents raising concerns of bullying to school officials indicates the need to understand what is occurring from when parent's report. This understanding is necessary to develop informed policies and procedures that support parents and families who experience a vulnerable situation like being a target of bullying.

#### *Parents Reporting Youth Victimization in Kindergarten*

The effects of school bullying can be noticed by parents with their children as early as preschool (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Often, signs of bullying can emerge through uncharacteristic behaviors like being unhappy at home, moodiness, withdrawal, or verbally lashing out (Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). However, a parent's early identification of victimization through bullying does not assure school officials share the same concern. Humphrey and Crisp (2008) found in their Australian qualitative study that parents of Kindergarteners who were being bullied found school officials unaware of their child being bullied. Instead, in what seemed like an effort to avoid labeling young children, school officials considered the reported bullying behavior as "inappropriate or unacceptable behavior" (Humphrey & Crisp, 2008, p. 48). This response by school officials minimized bullying and stopped short of acknowledging the seriousness of parents' concerns. Parents of the victimized youth found school officials unwilling to intervene. Parents felt powerless, angry, and were tainted with a sense of guilt in their inability to protect their child. Parents also reported the victimized child's relations changed with siblings as a result. Siblings found themselves not wanting to engage with their victimized brother or sister. These findings suggest that early victimization from

bullying must be addressed quickly and intentionally by school officials. Further, interventions need to be considered for youth identified as bullying, especially in the evaluation of the parent-child relationship.

### *Influences of Maternal Responses*

In an examination of factors influencing maternal caregivers' decisions to intervene in school bullying, Terrean-Miller (2006) sent out 762 surveys to female caregivers of students who attended one Midwest middle school. Fifteen percent of the surveys were returned with six being rejected due to males filling out the survey, leaving 109 caregivers. The decision to exclude male caregivers was made due to literature reflecting their poor response rates. The caregivers were all white females, aged 28 to 62 years old. All identified themselves as *mothers* except three who reported being grandmothers; eighty percent of all respondents were married.

Statistically, Terrean-Miller accomplished having an overall power of .833. The power analysis utilized an F-test with an alpha .05 for this study. This is based on an  $f^2$  of .08 (small effect size) and a desired power of .80.

A minimum of a 101 participants was needed in order to do a regression analysis. Therefore, a multiple regression design sample was chosen to conduct exploratory interaction tests to see if a main effect was to be found. If a main effect were to be found, it would be based on any of three predictor variables: A) whether the victim was their child, B) whether the caregiver perceives the victim to be experiencing a heightened level of distress due related to the bullying, and C) if the maternal caregivers themselves were victimized by a bully while in school.

Terrean-Miller (2006) used eight vignettes of physical, verbal, and relational/cyber bullying to gather personal responses from maternal caregivers. The researcher did not supply a predetermined definition of bullying to caregivers. Instead, he/she allowed the participants to use their own defining characteristics of bully and being a victim. The caregivers personally rated the level of distress they perceived each situation would cause them and their likelihood to intervene on their child's behalf.

Findings for the first hypothesis sought to determine caregivers' perceptions of the victim's distress. The level of distress was to predict likelihood maternal intervention. Results indicated that both a caregivers perception of the victim's distress and her status as caregiver of the victim significantly predicted their reported likelihood to intervene:  $F(3, 103) = 16.24, p = .001$  (Terrean-Miller, 2006). A caregiver's childhood victim status was found not to be a significant predictor (non-significant at the .013 p-value level; Bonferroni's adjustment was calculated at an adjusted p-value .0125 to four regression analyses) in intervening. Therefore, a caregiver's previous victimization was least influential of the three predictors (Terrean-Miller, 2006). The author suggests that this could be a result of the perception of something you just have to go through, "I made it through it so will you" perspective of the victim's situation (Terrean-Miller, 2006, p. 52). This reaction, however, may not support the victim's self-esteem or sense of well-being, especially following an episode of being bullied (Boulton & Underwood, 1992).

In an exploratory analysis, Terrean-Miller (2006) used independent t-tests to find if different types of bullying were impacted by caregivers' perceptions of how helpful their intervening would be. Perceived helpfulness was significantly correlated at the .05 level with maternal caregivers' likelihood to intervene in both physical and cyber

bullying situations, but a significant correlation was not found for verbal or relational bullying (Terrean-Miller, 2006). One of the arguments the author lays out for this finding is that with both physical and cyber bullying there can be concrete evidence, whether through bruising or printed material, that gives maternal caregivers something to present. This is consistent with Yoon and Kerber's (2003) finding that at least for teachers, their likelihood of intervening was directly related to their perceptions of the seriousness of the bullying. Perhaps for parents, verbal and relational bullying are seen as less serious and therefore, they are less likely to get involved.

In addition to providing quantitative insight, Terrean-Miller (2006) also provides qualitative data that the victim's distress level and child's relation to the maternal caregiver are critical in the decision to intervene. The perceived seriousness of the situation, and how the caregiver interprets the situation, was explored. For instance, whether the bullying was immoral or inappropriate seemed to influence a caretaker's willingness to get involved on the child's behalf (Terrean-Miller, 2006). Therefore, a parent's understanding the seriousness of the child's being bullied is an important variable for any kind of parent decision to respond on the child's behalf.

#### *The Now What?*

Although the Department of Education has encouraged parents to report bullying to a school official since 1998 (Whitted & Dupper, 2005), we do not know how often or what occurs when parents do report bullying to middle school officials. Mentions of reporting bullying are outlined in many mainstream websites and books. The book *Weakfish* by School Safety Specialist Dorn (2006) outlines suggested steps in parents' reporting. First, a parent seeking the child's permission to talk to school staff, like an

administrator, teachers, bus drivers or other school employees, is recommended. Dorn (2006) believes following the school's "chain of command" if and when "inaction or excuses" arise is proper protocol (p. 129). If this process fails to offer protection, Dorn recommends seeking legal counsel. If the child is not safe in school, Dorn then advocates a parent removing the child from the abusive environment of the school. Dorn then recommends getting legal support when schools do not take appropriate actions. However, the lengthy litigation process, often up to four years, may not reward a diligent parent who seeks damages from an unprotective school corporation (Stooksbury, 2007).



## CHAPTER III

### BACKGROUND HISTORY:

#### U.S. EDUCATION, GOVERNMENT, AND ANTI-BULLYING LAW

Dating back to the nineteenth century, education within the U.S. has its agency legally supported by the state and can be considered an aspect of state functioning (Moehlman, 1940). Government's function in education is to provide the means under which the state can achieve its objective. Education therefore, is to perform and account for important functions of providing opportunities of success by awakening the child to societal cultural values, preparing for later professional training, and adjustment to multiple environments (Bailey, 2006). Moehlman suggests education must also "inculcate in the individual a sense of social and moral responsibility to the group..." (p. 11). Therefore, state government is responsible in obliging its citizens the opportunity to succeed.

Because the state is also concerned about the continuity of a civil society and realizes civility is not "transmittable by biological means" alone, the need for education arises from the wish to have "continuity in society" (Moehlman, 1940, p. 9). This cultural transmission, or what Moehlman (1940) refers to as "social reproduction," is called education (p. 9).

Moehlman (1940) claims that schools as institutions are determined by the character of their culture; that each school or district, and the leadership that responds to issues, uses a methodology that varies within the type of culture in which it is immersed. This can account for the heterogeneity found among schools from town to town, district

to district. This heterogeneity may help explain why variations occur in dealing with problematic issues such as school bullying.

Schools are governed by a complicated set of related federal and state laws (Limber & Small, 2003). However, Limber and Small state the majority of disciplinary policies and practices are crafted at the state and local levels. This is due to the belief that “local” laws have a greater potential to influence policies (p. 446). The federal government provides incentives for states to craft policies that address their concerns e.g., school safety. The federal government has recognized since the 1970s that school safety is a concern it would like states to address.

“Governments do not intervene unless it is generally agreed on that there is a problem” (Waldfogel, 2000, p. 28). During the last 10 years, anti-bullying legislation seems to have generated interest into the public health debate (Srabstien, Berkman, & Pyntikova, 2008). Since 1999, when the first anti-bullying law was passed in Georgia, the majority of states (39 in the U.S.) have constructed anti-bullying laws (High, 2009). Most of these state laws have definitions, suggestions, and mandates for schools to consider. (Limber & Small, 2003).

#### *Public Concern, School Bullying and Social Policy*

Social policies often reflect the kind of society sought after by its citizens (Latridis, 1995). American society’s concern about school safety, and the risks posed from children who have been bullied and responded through gun violence, have been addressed (Vossekuil et al., 2002). These school shootings, as witnessed by U.S. citizens from the news video, have demonstrated the graphic nature of shootings in Columbine, Colorado; Jonesboro, Arkansas; and West Paducah, Kentucky. These horrific crises

create public discourse on what can be done to prevent and protect students from future catastrophic incidences.

The earliest recorded incident of a U.S. school shooting took place in 1974, in Olean, New York. A student set off school fire alarms, then shot two janitors and a fireman with a hunting rifle (Vossekuil et al., 2000). Years after this incident, public understanding of threatening behaviors due to youth being bullied at school began to emerge, pushing lawmakers into a position of creating a structure and for schools to function in the maintenance of society's values, goals and needs for safety. This structural-functional response is meant to respond by attempting to stabilize the extraordinary events like school shootings, within society from reoccurring (Liska, 1987).

Because the U.S. Secret Service has the responsibility to protect threats towards its nation's leaders, it also must assess, identify, and manage potential risks before the actual risks take place. One area of risk that was identified by the federal government was that of school shooters. This emerging threat brought collaboration between the U.S. Department of Education's Safe School Initiative and the U.S. Secret Service. The collaboration was assess and identify potential risks and to understand and prevent targeted risks of severe violence at school (Vossekuil et al., 2000).

*What shooters tell us?* Each state's interest in anti-bullying laws was heightened by a report published in 2000 by the U.S. Secret Service (Vossekuil et al., 2000). The Secret Service research team investigated students who targeted others and acted out violently with guns in schools. The belief from the Secret Service's standpoint was that these types of students who used guns at school could pose future risks to high-level

government officials. For their study, Vossekuil and colleagues examined the records of 41 attackers from 37 different schools. Ten of the shooters that were interviewed—providing in-depth, specific information on their decisions to engage in a school-based attack—while records from others provided additional information. At least two researchers gathered information for each case. The findings in the report stated that in two-thirds of the incidents, the attackers killed one or more students, faculty, or others when guns were used. Almost all the attackers developed the idea to harm the target before acting out the attack; over half developed their idea at least two weeks prior to the attack (Vossekuil et al., 2000). In over two-thirds of the cases, Vossekuil and colleagues (2000) found:

The attackers felt persecuted, *bullied*, threatened, attacked, or injured by others prior to the incidents. A number of attackers had experienced bullying...that was longstanding and severe. In those cases, the experience of bullying appeared to play a major role in motivating the attack at school. (p. 7)

Almost two years after Vossekuil and colleagues 2000 report was released, the Safe School Initiative final report concluded that efforts to curtail bullying in American schools should be a priority to reduce bullying violence (Ferrell-Smith, 2003). In 2003, the federal government with the involvement of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, developed a website “Stop Bullying Now” in order to assist states’ teachers, parents, and students in finding resources about bullying and prevention (Srabstien et al., 2008).

#### *Anti-Bullying Legislation Formation*

As public understanding increased from reports like Vossekuil and colleagues (2000) in connecting bullying and victimization as motivation for school shootings, several states took legislative actions. As of 2003, 16 states responded to bullying

concerns by passing anti-bullying legislation that supports schools in responding to a student who is reported as a bully (Ferrell-Smith, 2003). By September of 2009, 39 U.S. states have “anti-bullying laws.”

The watchdog group, *BullyPolice.org*, posts a copy of each state’s *anti-bullying law* with a critique of each law. Of the 39 states with a specific *anti-bullying law* (e.g., a law with the specific behavior of “bullying” mentioned), the Bully Police grades each state using 13 criteria (see Appendix D). The 39 passing states grade-range from A++ (Kentucky, Delaware, Florida, and Maryland, Wyoming) to a C- for the state of Texas. The states with low grades often have flaws such as no date set when the law is to take effect, therefore questioning its legitimacy. The Bully Police, as of mid 2009, have identified 11 states with an F grade due to not having an anti-bullying law: Alabama, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, New York, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The state of Indiana earned a B+ grade (High, 2009).

The Bully Police website also provides information on how-to’s regarding facilitating lawmakers into crafting anti-bullying legislation. The sites organizers also provide anti-bullying information and resources to parents and lawmakers in other countries including Canada, the Netherlands, Europe, and Japan. The group tracks current laws, pending laws, and the need for laws in states currently void of a law. The founder and co-director of the watchdog group, Brenda High, is a parent whose 13-year-old son, after being repeatedly assaulted in a middle school gym by a bully, shot himself at home while saying goodbye to his father on the phone (High, 2009).

One of the criteria used in evaluating existing anti-bullying laws is if the law is an actual *anti-bullying* law—instead of just a school safety law or harassment law. This is important because laws that are only “harassment” laws fail to capture “critical components” such as the power imbalance that is specific to bullying. Also, harassment laws are based on traits (e.g., gender, race, nationality, religion etc.) where bullying may be one child exercising harm by using power and control over another (Limber & Small, 2003). These distinctions may seem small, however, the nature of bullying is often subtle and covert, often without provocation (Olweus, 1993). Therefore, states anti-bullying laws must go beyond harassment and school violence to address this form of harm.

The Bully Police also reports if a state’s law clearly defines bullying in terms of verbal, physical and relational, but also covers multiple communication types of bullying (e.g., written graffiti, electronic, verbal etc.). Further, the watchdog group reports whether or not the law involves each state Department of Education providing curriculum material and school training. Further, it assesses whether or not there is a requirement for a school safety specialist to become *certified* within the school district. The school safety specialist’s role is to help inform school personal that bullying is prohibited and when it does occur, and what provisions should be made to include parent involvement, investigation, and intervention.

*The history of Indiana’s anti-bullying policy.* In Indiana, attention began to develop at the state level for considering anti-bullying legislation came after the 1999 Columbine school shooting. In 2004 the State Superintendent of Public Instruction Suellen Reed called for anti-bullying legislation. Initially, the legislation received strong support in the State Senate, but died in the House of Representatives. Reintroduced

during the 2005 legislative session, anti-bullying legislation (Code 20-33-8-13.5) added a specific definition of bullying to the bill. The bill called for:

A statutory definition of bullying; an education outreach and training initiative under the Indiana Safe School Fund; a prohibition of the act of bullying with the discipline policies and procedures issued by school corporations; and Safe School Committees in all public schools.  
(Stooksbury, 2007, p. 4)

On February 7, 2005, the Senate bill 0285 passed Indiana State Senate. The bill then went to the Indiana House and on March 28, 2005, passed with 67 votes (See Appendix E for Indiana Anti-bullying Law). The bill became law on July 1, 2005.

In reviewing and analyzing Indiana's anti-bullying law, several potential protective mandates are missing from the law (Brown & Aalsma, 2010). The first concern is the absence of anonymous reporting for youth being victimized from bullying. Students often avoid reporting due to the fear of retaliation (Henderson & Hymel, 2003). With an anonymous reporting system in place, the bully would have his or her security diminished by the fear that peers or their parents would be willing turn in the bully secretly. In reviewing state anti-bullying laws, Arizona, Connecticut and Florida have passed legislation mandating anonymity for students who report bullying to school officials (Brown & Aalsma, 2010). This action communicates to students that school officials value their reporting and future protection from retaliation.

The second concern in Indiana's anti-bullying law is the absence of the requirement to collect building-performance records regarding bullying (Brown & Aalsma, 2010). These records demonstrate school official's responding to, investigating in and intervention of reports in bullying that can provide data for the state and its schools e.g., where the bullying is occurring, or whether the bully or victim received counseling.

For example, in Delaware, there state's anti-bullying law requires that all bullying incidents be reported to the Department of Education within five (5) working days pursuant to Department of Education regulations (Spence et al., 2007). In Indiana, no such documentation or action is required by any school. This leaves the question: How does anyone know if appropriate actions, improvements, or adjustments are being made? Further, how does the state know the types and frequency of bullying that is occurring? Consequences leave public school community members (e.g., parents, their children, and stakeholders), out of knowing what bullying is occurring and how school officials are intervening (Brown & Aalsma, 2010).

The third concern of Indiana's anti-bullying law is that it has an unclear provision for "parental involvement," (Brown & Aalsma, 2010). For instance, it is up to each school's discretion on whether or not to report to parents when their child has been found to be bullying or if their child has been victimized. A law serious about intervening to end bullying must consider acknowledging the problem by making parents aware of what is occurring regarding behaviors and consequences.

Lastly, the watchdog group Bully Police (2009) points out that a "*top rated law*" includes provisions that victims of bullying receive counseling or therapy to be paid for by the school where bullying occurred. However, in my review of each state's anti-bullying law, only Florida and Utah lawmakers have voted this policy of receiving counseling into law. This is important due to both victims and bullies being found to suffer from increased rates of depression and anxiety (Fekkes, Pijpers, Fredriks, Vogels, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2006).



*From the Lawyers' Perspective*

Having a statewide anti-bullying policy for public schools sounds supportive for potential victims, their parents, and to society. Yet there has been no known research that indicates a laws effectiveness to reduce and prevent school bullying (Limber & Small, 2003). Further, Weddle (2004) argues that courts are hesitant to hold school administrators or teachers liable for serious outbreaks of violence, let alone lower grade violence like bullying.

Stooksbury (2007), an Indiana lawyer who specializes in school law, recently reported that non-compliance with Indiana Code (I.C.) 20-33-8-13.5 (See Appendix E, section 20-33-8-13.5) “cannot be construed to give rise to a cause of action against a person or school corporation based on non-compliance with this section” (p. 6). This section refers to the entire act of bullying that occurs on school grounds. Further, “Non-compliance with this section may not be used as evidence against a school corporation in a cause of action” (Stooksbury, 2007, p. 6). This suggests a parent cannot sue (civilly) an Indiana school for the absence of having an anti-bullying policy; and that the school cannot be held accountable due to a lack of a bully policy being provided (Stooksbury, 2007). This is made clear in the last line of Indiana’s anti-bullying law (see Appendix E) that states a schools noncompliance with the anti-bullying law may not be used as evidence against a school corporation as a cause of action. However, Stooksbury (2007) states that tort law (a private civil cause of action) can be used if a parent can prove that the student or peer, parents, or teachers damaged their child through the school’s lack of supervision and lack of response to complaints.

Through a legal civil process, Stooksbury suggests the victim's family names everyone from the school district's superintendent down to the bully and the bully's parent(s) in a lawsuit. In order for the school to be found liable, the plaintiff must demonstrate that the school failed to properly supervise its students and failed to take *reasonable action* in response to a bullying report (Stooksbury, 2007). The victim's family, must also prove the child was harmed and claim damages, e.g., physical injury, a mental health diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, anxiety, or school phobia as a result. Under common law, schools and their agents (teachers or administrators) can be sued for negligence for student injuries that occur at school during school functions; however, schools are not *strictly* responsible for student injuries. If a school can prove, through any documentation, they exercised *reasonable care* for the safety of students under its supervision, than the school is seen by law to have adequately protected its student(s) and may not be liable for any injuries or damages.

Another legal facet to deciding if a school is liable is whether school officials had information or the ability to anticipate foreseeable harm to a victim and that their lack of action was the cause of that harm (Stooksbury, 2007). If the school cannot provide documentation that it responded in a way that provided *reasonable care* to the victim, the legal suit against the school may be successful. The parent may sue for actual damages, loss of employment hours, and the student's pain and suffering, which is estimated at three times the cost of the student's medical expenses. Stooksbury (2007) also reports that depending on the alleged injuries and the school's potential exposure to liability, these types of cases usually settle out of court. However, a typical "bully v. victim" negligence case has a settlement range of \$10,000.00 to \$20,000.00 depending on the

extent of the injuries to the victim (Stooksbury, 2007, p. 9). It is important to consider that if the school can prove that the student victim was just one percent liable, for example, the student was aware of the specific risk involved and assumed the risk by going to school, despite his or her knowledge of the risk, the school can be found not liable. However, this is difficult to prove because many courts are reluctant to find a victim liable even at one percent. Typically, in a civil negligence case involving a bully and a victim, the bully's parent's homeowners insurance pays the victim's expenses and litigation defense costs for the victim's family (Stooksbury, 2007). However, Stooksbury (2007) warns on average the entire civil (legal) process can run between two to four years.

Therefore, an anti-bullying law may be mostly symbolic in providing empowerment to parents. The law can actually thwart parental efforts in effectively holding the school accountable by seeking legal recourse (Weddle, 2004). The Indiana law does provide assurances (e.g., provide a school safety specialist that coordinates a safe school committee), but lacks liability and therefore, accountability for schools to provide protection to victims of bullying. The intent of the law, and what the public believes is an enforceable law, that on the surface seems designed to protect children and back parents when victimization occurs, parallels what Kiss-Sarnoff (1999) calls "sanctified snake oil" (p. 396). Snake oil refers to "any purported solution to a social problem which is unscientific, has not been adequately tested, is incompletely defined, is used inappropriately, or stands in the way of a superior alternative" (Kiss-Sarnoff, 1999, p. 396). This law becomes "sanctified" when it gets "funded, mandated or otherwise endorsed by a government entity" without requiring proof of effectiveness (Kiss-Sarnoff,

1999, p. 396). Policy makers seem to have crafted a state law that protects schools and school officials from not intervening in a way that provides protection—at least legally.

*Legal accountability.* There is an opportunity for Indiana and other states that have weak anti-bullying laws to mandate legal accountability of school officials by spelling out how the bully, the bully's parents, and other participants will be brought into the process during a substantiated bullying. In order for the law to have impact, there must be protocols for school officials to follow. From the time of the initial report to the investigation and intervention, the responses must be swift in order to protect those who are bullied. In this timeline, the parents of the bully will have to adjust to the state's mandates e.g., counseling and or behavioral contract. These kinds of specific legislative laws can be important due to qualitative evidence suggesting that bullies are found to have "a great capacity for deflecting responsibility" and blame the adults and their rules instead of their own bullying actions—or blaming the victim (Cranham & Carroll, 2003, p. 128).

Lastly, mandating individual school bullying reports to the State Department of Education can provide a mechanism that provides disaggregated data on school bullying incidences while providing a process for school officials to follow up on. Making incidences of bullying public during school board meetings can increase the community members' awareness that the actions taken to protect the victims were implemented.

These mandated incidence reports could be taken seriously if school board members were made to sign off during monthly public meetings in the spirit of public disclosure and transparency. Such a policy would then create accountability between schools and the public they serve.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHODS

Qualitative research in bullying is somewhat rare. Smith and Brain (2000) claim much of the social science research on bullying has been framed by quantitative paradigms with few qualitative insights. Qualitative research insights can add to new understandings and meanings that advance the discipline's knowledge of the bullying phenomena (Smith & Brain, 2000). Within the bullying phenomena, parents experiences, although important, have yet to be understood (Benbenishty & Astor, 2005). Therefore, this dissertation will focus in-depth on parents' lived experiences in discovering, reporting, and living through reporting bullying.

In considering a specific method of inquiry, the research question must provide a good fit to a particular branch within the philosophy of science (Maggs-Rapport, 2001). The overarching question for this study is *what are parents' lived-experience when reporting their middle schoolchild who is being bullying to a school official?* This question of understanding is best suited for the qualitative tradition of phenomenology.

The method of phenomenology allows me as researcher to explore what the bullying experiences are like for parents, adding new perspectives and meanings to current knowledge (Sadala & Adorno, 2002). The phenomenological method gives the reader the narratives as the closest thing to the experience itself (Moran, 2000). Palmer (1969a) explains this by stating "phenomenology is a means of being led by the phenomenon through a way of access genuinely belonging to it" (p. 128). It is the "world of action [that] represents the highest level of human engagement, especially when it emerges in joint co-operative undertakings and in discussion" (Moran, 2000, p. 312).

This approach allows me as researcher to avoid having to remain detached or distanced from the data collection, analysis, and report of findings of this phenomenological research. As Patton (2002) suggests, “Distance does not guarantee objectivity, it merely guarantees distance” (p. 575). Therefore, the process of inquiry will allow me as the researcher to listen closely, question, reflect, recheck and interpret important dimensions that emerge from the narratives of participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002).

This deep empathic experience of understanding the participant seems similar to the quality of a social work practitioner being immersed in the client’s lived-experience. These parallels of social work practice, often relying on client centered approaches, and phenomenology, asking participants to *walk me through* what is occurring in a specific situation, fits well to me as social worker, as a practitioner or scholar.

Although linkages to social work practice are found in the phenomenological process, a specific of review of phenomenology as it pertains to research will be shared. This review will lead into some historical underpinnings that take us to Heidegger’s brand of phenomenology: Interpretive, or, sometimes referred to as Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology.

### *Hermeneutical Phenomenology*

I have used hermeneutical (interpretive) phenomenology as my specific research method (see Appendix F for related terms to Hermeneutic research). Hermeneutics is not so much a means for developing procedures of understanding, but one of clarifying conditions in which understanding takes place (Koch, 1995). In essence, this method brings the philosophical tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology to bear on a

phenomenon of interest in a way that tells a story of understanding the human world (McManus-Holroyd, 2007) by looking at aspects of knowing: *what do I take this experience as?*

Hermeneutic phenomenology sees *meaning* as part and parcel to being human. Not understanding the meaning of a situation is not acceptable; even if the meaning -- e.g., being racist --, is bad. Heidegger (1962) argues we already understand *our* world, and things show up as mattering. Truth then becomes a form of unconcealment, drawing something forgotten from the experience or interpretation into visibility (Harman, 2007). In this context, the meaning is embedded within culture, time, history and other circumstances which Heidegger refers to as the person's *historicality* (Koch, 1995) within the participant's experience (Creswell, 2003).

My task was to interpret the participants' experiences within the contexts of reporting to a school official that their child being bullied and to stay close to the experience itself (ontologic) (Patton, 2002; Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson, & Spence, 2008). The task took place under the Indiana Anti-bullying law that began in July of 2005. The law is important because it implies a stance the state is taking in protecting schoolchildren from the harm-doing of bullying.

*Historical underpinnings.* Phenomenology has a long history within philosophy. The word phenomenology began showing up in philosophical writings during the eighteenth century. However, Aristotle (300 B.C.) does receive credit for the exploration in philosophy of understanding and particularly the meaning of being. Philosophers such as Lambert, Herder, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel all used the term (Moran, 2000). By the mid-1700s Lambert coined the term phenomenology and defined it as a science of

appearance that allows us to move in the direction of truth, just as optics clarifies perspective in order to deduce true features of the object seen (as cited in Moran, 2000, p. 6). In 1786, Kant used the term in the book *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* in a section labeled “Metaphysical Foundations of Phenomenology” dealing with the area of motion or rest that are connected to our senses, such as color, motion, and properties that are dependent on the human observer (Kant, 2004). Hegel also moved phenomenology forward in 1807 with the book *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which was revisited in the 1920s by Hyppolite, Wahl, and Merleau-Ponty. Hyppolite gave Hegel credit over 100 years later for being the “progenitor of the phenomenological method” (Moran, 2000, p. 7). These writings influenced Edmund Husserl, a mentor to Martin Heidegger.

Husserl, in the book *Logical Investigations*, published in 1901, asserted an alternative to post-positivism (Sadala & Adorno, 2002). Husserl argued the philosophy of uncovering was a “rigorous science” consisting of description of what is self evident and not of causal explanation (Moran, 2000, pp. 7-8). What is self-evident with the human experience has helped make phenomenology a useful tool for uncovering and pushing forward thinking and being within social science. Husserl contended that experience is the ultimate ground for knowledge, the primary structure of which is intentionality or directedness (Magee, 1987). That is, the mind (consciousness) body is split and directed toward objects in the *life-world* (Koch, 1995). The life-world consists of the structures that order and give form to experience which is always already formed by essential organizing structures. Further, Husserl is said to be more mechanical in the way he approaches phenomenology (Koch, 1995). Therefore, Husserl contended that the



acquisition of knowledge should be approached by studying the structures of meaningful experiences or of “things themselves” (Koch, 1995). Husserl proposed phenomenology as the systematic analysis of consciousness and its objects, that is, the analysis of that which is experienced (Magee, 1987). Nonetheless, Husserl retained a commitment to epistemology. Husserl believed the study of phenomenon could still be utilized to inductively derive theories as a way of explaining the world, Husserl believed (Magee, 1987).

Martin Heidegger, who was a student and assistant of Husserl in 1919, stated that phenomenology must be attentive to the history of being (historicality), to temporality of concrete living in time (being), and must not remain settled with description of the internal consciousness of time—that “description was only a derivative form of interpretation” (Moran, 2000, p. 20). Where Husserl describes phenomenon, Heidegger wants to interpret them, the *taking as* (Koch, 1995). Therefore, Heidegger stays away from psychological or descriptive analysis with phenomenology. Instead, Heidegger uses other assumptions that make the philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology.

### *Heideggerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology*

The assumptions Heidegger puts forth in understanding hermeneutic phenomenology are:

1. Human beings are social, dialogical beings.
2. Understanding is always before us in the shared background practices; it is in the human community of societies and cultures, in the language, in our skills and activities, and in our inter-subjective and common meanings.
3. We are always already in a hermeneutic circle of understanding.

4. Interpretation presupposes a shared understanding and therefore has a threefold fore-structure of understanding.
5. Interpretation involves the interpreter and the interpreted in a dialogical relationship. (Plager, 1994, p. 71)

Heidegger explains in the book *Being and Time* that phenomenology is made up of two Greek terms: *phaninomenon* and *logos* (Heidegger, 1962). The Greek translation of *phaninomenon* means to show itself while *logos* means to count, tell, say or speak. Heidegger suggests that phenomenology is “simply that which shows itself in itself, the manifest” (Moran, 2000, p. 229). However, the showing of itself is not the physical part of being but “that which perdures as true but is not always apparent without deliberate effort” (Mardas, 2001, p. n.a). *The being* within a situation actually comes out of reflection on the matter as it dwells within the participant, out of concealment, in which I as a researcher am left to think and rethink for analysis ‘What is the text saying? What is it not?’ (Mardas, 2001). However, Heidegger takes a stance that in order to do this inquiry successfully, one must understand the process of the essential foundations of the hermeneutic circle and that in which it is grounded (Plager, 1994). Therefore, to understand the circle, a threefold fore-structure must be put in place. Plager (1994) gives reference to Heideggerian thinking:

1. *A fore-having*: we come to a situation with a practical familiarity, that is, with background practices from our world that make an interpretation possible.
2. *A fore-sight*: because of our background we have a point of view from which we make an interpretation.

3. *A fore-conception*: because of our background we have some expectations of what we might anticipate in an interpretation. (p. 72)

This fore-structure that is often taken for granted or bracketed in research is brought forth in Heidegger's method of inquiry (Plager, 1994). It is essential, Plager (1994) argues, in order for the project to have credibility, that the investigator "lays out preconceptions, biases, past experiences, and even hypotheses that make the project significant for the investigator and that may affect how the interpretation takes shape" (p. 72). With that being understood by the research participant, the narrative is re-reflected by the researcher in order to make sense of the participants' experience (Plager, 1994).

The fore-structure is dynamic and often referred to as the hermeneutic circle--a circle of understanding that is always operating as humans are engaged or involved in the world. Within the circle, we "understand and interpret something as something because we have a background (pre-understanding) of shared human practices" (Plager, 1994, p. 72). Therefore, it is not new knowledge that has been formed but understanding of the phenomenon which has already been understood (Koch, 1995). Likewise, my interpretation as researcher is a derivative of understanding. It allows me to bring out something as something by working out the possibilities projected in understanding grounded in background, pre-understanding, co-constitution, and interpretation (Koch, 1995). In order to answer the ontological question, "what does it mean to be a person," the researcher has some pre-understanding and through culture, history and language, the interpreters (participant and researcher) participate in making *what* Heidegger calls *Dasein*, the understanding of being a being in a situation (Koch, 1995). Therefore, the

interpretation of being is a derivative of the understanding by “the working out of possibilities projected in understanding” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 189).

*Personal fore-sight.* How I interpret what occurred between Husserl and Heidegger is within a historical context. The influences of positivism were seen as actual methods of science at that time. Husserl seems to push the assumptions aside and take a more post-positivist philosophical stance, leading him to descriptive phenomenology. Through the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Husserl laid the groundwork to battle and answer heated questions of outrage from the positivist social science community. Husserl had to defend his position on the questions of validity (Husserl brackets his subjectivity to explain his being objective), history (Husserl is A-historical), culture, language, practices (Husserl says the essence is about conscious mind) and interpretation (Husserl lets the data speak for itself with no researcher participation in interpreting). These are but a few of Husserl’s stances to uncover scientific knowledge (Koch, 1995). Husserl it seems, in the context of time, history, academic mores and values, took the huge step from the traditional scientific method of enquiry, yet in order to preserve some legitimacy from peers within the academy, could not allow himself to go further astray. With the foundation of new assumptions within phenomenology already laid by Husserl, Heidegger could take a critical look at Husserl’s work and push even further, by philosophically questioning Husserl’s primary assumptions, adding a new philosophical approach as interpretive phenomenology that touched the core of existentialism. In doing so, Heideggerian hermeneutical phenomenology pushed itself into the research world by examining not the question of knowing (epistemological), but the experience of

understanding being (ontological) (Koch, 1995). The following illustration assists in capturing Heidegger's philosophy on hermeneutics as explained by Cuputo (1993):

In Heidegger, constituting means an uncovering, a letting be seen, which is requisite if the being is to show itself from itself. If Dasein [being in the world] does not build, and so hammer, then the hammer cannot be too heavy or indeed be a hammer at all. *Besorgen* constitutes the hammer as a hammer, in as much as it opens up the horizon within which it can show itself as a hammer. 'Letting be seen' in Heidegger is no mere passive opening of our eyes so that things may just pour in upon us. It is a matter of actively projecting the being in its proper mode of Being, so as to make it accessible to us. It is letting be in the active sense of freeing the thing to show itself as what it is. Dasein constitutes the world by releasing it. (p. 338)

The quest in "letting it be seen" that which has been "covered up" is important to Heidegger's intent (Heidegger, 1962, p. 59). He argues that a Being can be covered up so extensively that it becomes forgotten and no question arises about it or about its meaning. The act of being may have been taken for granted or set aside. Therefore, it is through thoughtful questions that the bringing back to the act itself to "look behind it" and find something else "which does not appear" becomes ontologically relevant (Heidegger, 1962, p. 60).

By using the Heideggerian hermeneutic tradition of qualitative inquiry, I make clear the assumptions from which the philosophical underpinnings guide my thinking as person and researcher bound by experiences as a social worker working with children, and thinking of being as participant. This acknowledgement of experience, knowledge, and values as researcher ends the illusion of pretending to bracket or isolate my biases and subjectivity as Husserl's form of phenomenology attempts to accomplish. Koch (1995) argues by bracketing my pre-understandings of the object of interpretation is just an attempt to suppress or avoid self as researcher. Husserl's retaining a commitment to

the subject/object split while Heidegger overturning it has allowed me to acknowledge to readers a relevant presupposition. A value-oriented approach is unavoidable because all research contains pre-understanding from the context the researcher brings forth (Flyvbjerg, 2005). The values that are acknowledged by the researcher can become meaningful to its consumers in the sense that contextual understanding is being transmitted to reader about the researcher (Koch, 1995).

Because hermeneutic phenomenology does not posit politically or psychologically predetermined frameworks, or attempt to explain or reconcile an underlying cause of a particular experience the tradition demands an absence of applying a theory to explain or predict in either pre or post analysis of the study (Diekelmann & Ironside, 2005). This absence of viewing the phenomena through a prescribed theory runs counter to the epistemic model of social science research (Flyvbjerg, 2005). However, in the social science world, there are some clear concerns about this research approach.

Although phenomenology means “a way of staying true to what must be thought” (Harman, 2007, p. 155), the critiques on phenomenology have been noted. Moran (2000) highlights several social science positivist philosophers who voice concerns. For instance, Schlick (1882-1936) has criticized Husserl’s reliance on intellectual intuition while Carnap criticized Heidegger for promoting a “meaningless pseudo-metaphysics” (Moran, 2000, p. 21). Perhaps the harshest critique to phenomenology came from Marxists stating it as the “apotheosis of bourgeois individualism” (Moran, 2000, p. 21).

#### *Phenomenology in this Study*

Hermeneutic phenomenology has protected and integrated the subjective experience by allowing *shared meanings* and *common understandings* as the other aspect

to the nature of knowledge (Moran, 2000). I have examined the lived experiences of parents reporting their children as victims of bullying to middle school officials. I have made an effort to understand what it means to be a parent who discloses directly to a school official about incidences of bullying toward their child. At that moment, when the participant is describing or self interpreting being, the researcher holds a phenomenological stance—keeping themselves open to that lived experience of the participant “in its wholeness” (Sadala & Adorno, 2002, p. 283). This approach stands to better uncover the human interactions that take place by adding new perspectives that broaden knowledge of phenomenon (Sadala & Adorno, 2002). Therefore, the research problem, the questions that will address the phenomenon and the tradition of social science philosophy I am using to uncover experiences promotes the goodness-of-fit I am looking for.

Thus, my task was to understand participants’ experiences in a new way, questioning the narrative, holding open the possibilities, and letting the phenomenon show up (Diekelmann & Ironside, 2005; Patton, 2002). Each of these narrative accounts was read and reread in order to perceive the shared meanings of a phenomenon (Sadala & Adorno, 2002, p. 283). Therefore, I “determine the categories [themes], relationships and assumptions that inform the respondent’s view of the world in general and of the topic in particular” (Basit, 2003, p. 143) while describing what participants have in common (patterns) and bring to light new understandings of these parents’ experience (Creswell, 2007). In addition, I use exemplars as ways to show parents’ understanding in what they did and if/how that changed the situation for the parent and child. *What is the meaning and significance of being* for parents who performed this act on behalf of their child?

This examination takes place under the historical context of statewide anti-bullying legislation that has been in effect since July, 2005, designed to provide educational outreach and training to school personnel concerning: (A) the identification of; (B) the prevention of; and (C) intervention in bullying (2009). The convergences of perspectives from participants led me as a researcher to perceive common experiences and shared meanings of this phenomenon (Sadala & Adorno, 2002).

### *Sampling*

Perhaps nowhere does qualitative and quantitative research methodology differ more than in the sampling methods (Patton, 2002). My sample was derived from parents who have had this particular experience occur within their lives and therefore, who have an in-depth understanding of reporting their child being bullied to school officials (Patton, 2002). Unlike the random sample preferred by quantitative approaches, a purposeful sample was selected for this study. The idea behind purposeful sampling is to select participants who will best help the researcher understand the experience as it is lived (Creswell, 2003). Secondly, because this study has inclusion and exclusion criteria for assurance of quality, a criterion based sampling method was used (Creswell, 1998). Lastly, snowball sampling occurred by word of mouth about the study. These sample methods were used to find participants that allowed me to provide information-rich participants (Creswell, 2007).

*Participant reimbursement.* There was a 20-dollar Wal-Mart gift card given for study participation. Two of the participants refused, asking me to give them to someone who was in need.



*Generating interest.* I generated interest in study participation in several ways. First, pamphlets (See Appendix G) were placed in grocery stores, medical centers, boys and girls clubs, hair salons, public libraries, mental and public health centers, private practice counseling centers, public transportation bus stops, and other Indiana businesses. Second, the I.U. School of Social Work Media Relations department interviewed me. Many Indiana newspapers took up the electronically published article and printed it in their newspapers. Third, a PhD student suggested I build a university website with my information on the study and contact information. Fourth, that same PhD student recommended means of generating participants by using social networking websites. Yahoo parent groups (e.g., ADHD and home school groups) were notified about this study via the internet. Lastly, I was approved to use the state's school social worker's list serve to notify social workers of the study. The Indiana Parent Teacher organization was called six times, the secretary took messages. After three weeks of attempts, I no longer pursued this avenue. I also traditionally mailed Dr. Tony Bennett, the Indiana State Superintendent, a letter detailing the study and asking for his support but received no reply. Below are the participants and how they were alerted to the study:

Table 1: How Did Parents Hear About the Study?

Tom's Mom & Dad	Brochure in therapist's office
Chelsea's Mom	I.U.P.U.I news release
Sandra's Mom	Brochure in hospital waiting room
Elizabeth's Mom	County newspaper
Marcy's Mom	County newspaper
Rachel's Mom	Brochure in public library
Jack's Mom	University e-news release
Sadie's Mom	Informational paper at different school
Becky's Mom	Personal contact with researcher
Anna's Mom	Yahoo parent group bulletin board

As participants began responding to notifications of the study, whether by calling my cell phone or through email, I let them know this study sought to identify parents who had particular circumstances regarding bullying. This study qualification came from the initial contact information (see Appendix H). For email response, I sent parents the initial contact information. Once qualified, I meet with the parent either at their home or local library in a private room.

### *Participant Consent*

In speaking directly with the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the assessment was made that no consent form was needed for this study. These were adults who will volunteer to take part in sharing their experiences as parents. Therefore, it is presumed this study was minimal risk as later determined by the IRB.

*Sample inclusion/exclusion criteria.* For this study, there were inclusion criteria necessary for participation (Creswell, 2007). For inclusion, the parent must have: 1) spoken fluent English; 2) reported bullying in an Indiana Middle school between Fall 2005 and Fall 2008; 3) not been a K-12 public school employee in their child's school district; 4) spoken to a middle school official about the situation of bullying; 5) their bullied child receiving only regular education services during the time of bullying and reporting; 6) agreed that the bullying fit Olweus' (1996) definition (see Appendix A).

Interested participants for the study answered "yes" to all inclusion questions to take part in this study. Although Heideggerian phenomenology speaks of *holding open* the possibilities, it was my decision to exclude any special education student's parent from the study. This decision was based on my personal experience of the intense state oversight, which includes Individual Educational Plan (IEP) meetings specifically for

children receiving special education services that occur at least annually in a group format with teachers, principal, parent, social worker or other special education service provider. Legally, this (IEP) meeting can be called any time a parent requests. This close monitoring of the special education student by school and state creates a potential unequal situation of comparison. For example, if someone in the public environment threatened you or me, the response would be an X response by police officials. However, if that same person threatened a city official, my assumption is the response would be more intense, immediate, and severe for the attacker, therefore a Y response. My experience of working in several schools and school districts from 1993 to 2005 and being directly part of the special education process has shaped my thinking and given me privileged insight into some schools' operational structures. Special education students receive unique accommodations not afforded to the regular education population. I also acknowledge the position and perspective I have as a researcher may present an interpretative dilemma regarding this study. Thus, for these reasons, I decided to exclude parents of special education students from participating in this study.

*Sample size.* An appropriate sample size for this type of a phenomenological qualitative research study ranges from five to 25 participants (Creswell, 2007). However, Benner (1994) asserts it is not the size of the sample that is central, rather, "the quality of the text and the way that the lines of inquiry are reshaped by the participants" (Benner, 1994, p. 107). As the researcher, I know when I have enough participation as the themes begin to reiterate commonly among participants—often referred to as saturation (Patton, 2002). This occurred at about the eighth interview but I wanted to collect more data and

therefore, stopped interviewing after the tenth. The following are basic demographics of my sample:

Table 2: Parent Demographics

Parents	Rural, Urban or Suburban	Ethnic Background	Occupations
Tom's Mom & Dad	Suburban	White	M: Elementary Librarian F: Middle School Teacher
Chelsea's Mom	Suburban	White	M: Administrative Assistant F: Attorney
Sandra's Mom	Rural	White	M: Preschool Teacher F: Truck Driver
Elizabeth's Mom	Rural	White	M: Dental Office Manager F: Unknown
Marcy's Mom	Rural	White	M: Stay-at-home Mom F: Unknown
Rachel's Mom	Rural	White	M: Unknown F: Unknown
Jack's Mom	Suburban	White	M: Medical Doctor F: Medical Doctor
Sadie's Mom	Urban	White	M: Stay-at-home Mom F: Unknown
Becky's Mom	Suburban	White	M: University Administrator F: Disabled
Anna's Mom	Rural	White	M: Stay-at-home Mom F: Sales

M = Mother; F = Father

All parents who reported bullying were from Indiana. All parents from this study were white and all but two parents lived in small towns. The state has had an anti-bullying law in place since July of 2005 (Appendix E). All participants in this study had their middle school reporting experience after the anti-bullying law went into effect.

*Interview guide.* Patton (2002) describes the purpose of the interview is to gather high quality data pertaining to the experience in which my focus is anchored. That, in turn, is partly brought about by the sequence of meaningful, relevant questions given to the participants. Each participant was asked to fill out a basic demographic form that can be helpful understanding context (see Appendix I).

For the initial interview, a semi-structured interview guide was used. The first version of the interview guide was piloted on a participant from another state whose daughter had been bullied. From that experience, additional questions were added. Also, the questions that constructed the final version were reviewed by my dissertation committee members and the select staff from the Indiana University School of Nursing who are well versed in Heideggerian phenomenology.

An overarching goal in constructing questions is to elicit meaning, not to dominate, correct, lead or pass judgments (Schaffer, 2006). Patton (2002) believes a good interview “lays open thoughts, feelings, knowledge, and experience, not only to the interviewer, but also to the interviewee” (p. 405). Benner (1994) suggests starting out with a general question on the phenomenon and then becoming more specific is helpful in sequencing. From this knowledge, and one pilot interview, the following questions were developed as my final version of a semi-structured interview guide (Creswell, 2007):

*Interview guide:*

- (Ice breaker) How many years have you been a parent?
- I'm interested in how you as a parent came to understand that your child was being bullied and decided to report the concern to the school. Can you tell me about that experience?
- Before reporting took place, what kinds of thoughts or actions occurred for you as a parent knowing your child was being bullied?
- As this was occurring, were there ways you considered you might address the situation?
- Would you walk me through what occurred from the first contact with a school official regarding the bullying incident?
- What did you anticipate would occur when you reported?
- What was this experience, and all that happened after it, like for you?
- What was your reporting like for your child?
- Were there things you noticed in terms of your relationships with your child's teachers, administrator or school in general as a result of the reporting?
- Throughout the time of your child being bullied, how did Indiana's anti-bullying laws play a part for you as a parent?
- Were there any resources that were available to you as you went through this situation of reporting bullying?
- What did you learn from this experience?
- How has this experience affected your perception of your child's school?

- What do you as a parent wish had happened when you reported the bullying?
- What would you tell a parent who was considering reporting to a school official that their child is being bullied?
- Is there anything else would like to share with me about what it is like being a parent who reports that their child is being bullied to a school official?

Further probing questions were used as needed to insure I understand the experiences the participants related. For instance, I sought further elaboration by saying “Can you explain?” “Can you give me an example?” “Earlier, you mentioned A, but I also hear you saying it is different than A. Can you explain what you mean?” (Schaffer, 2006, p. 154). The question “How do you interpret that?” can give further depth from the participant’s experience (Benner, Tanner, & Chesla, 1996).

#### *Participant Interviews*

I offered participants several places to meet privately including the IU School of Social Work research lab, their home, or in a private room at a public library for recording of our interview together. My focus was to provide the most desirable, quiet setting for participants to feel comfortable in sharing.

The first interview was always face-to-face. The follow up interview was done by telephone. The central focus of the second interview was to clarify any confusion from the first interview and also ask if there was anything that was thought about or came up since the first interview regarding the topic (Creswell, 2007).



Both interviews were recorded and later transcribed using a computer. After the recordings from the face-to-face interview were transcribed, a copy of the interview was sent to the participants by e-mail or s-mail for a member check. Participants were asked to use red print regarding changes they would like me incorporate into the transcript. One participant did make minor additions of something her husband added. Two participants sent transcripts back with a few grammatical corrections in how they expressed themselves. One participant admitted that neither she nor her husband read the transcript, that it was an uneasy feeling to want to read the interview that lasted two and a half hours.

*Interview length.* The range of interview length lasted from a minimum of 45 minutes to a maximum of two and a half hours. The second interview by phone was used to review thoughts and ideas that may have surfaced since the first interview. It also allowed me to ask clarifying questions that were unclear after transcribing. This interview ranged from eight minutes to 40 minutes in length. A third interview took place by phone with three participants due to my need for clarification.

*Transcription.* I did all study transcription. In total, there were over a hundred single spaced pages of data. After the first transcription, I bought a dragon software package that allowed me to say the participants' words into a microphone that wrote the speech onto Microsoft Word. I then re-listened to the interview and used the keyboard for necessary corrections. This arguably created conditions that brought me closer to each participant's data.

### *Data Management*

Creswell (2007) encourages using additional data, such as pictures, video, newspaper clippings, memos, emails, or any archival information relevant to the study. Other than a page from a middle school handbook provided by a parent (included in the results section) I did not include any additional data sources.

I used a research log that helped me keep information in one central binder while being a repository for my thoughts and feelings that came from each interview. These entries became important to refer back to when analyzing data or needing additional information (Creswell, 2003).

In order to maximize participant confidentiality, each participant was assigned a case number for protection of identity (e.g., 01). The number was assigned to the transcript. Transcripts were assigned a pseudonym to protect the identity of the participant. Pseudonyms were also given to people mentioned by participants e.g., the principal, and to the school when the parent mentioned it by name in order to protect anonymity.

*Software and research logs.* MAXqda qualitative software for qualitative research was used for this study. The software is designed to look at patterns and themes as well as setting aside interesting and unusual variations or shared thoughts that may emerge in the data. I also relied on my research log to reveal descriptors and reflections before, during, and after the interviews into the memo portion of the software to give deeper context and clearer interpretation.

### *Quality Assessment*

Because each qualitative study is unique, criteria for assessing the quality of research must be logical and make sense in the context of the research being conducted. Creswell (2007) suggests five standards for specifically judging the quality of phenomenological research:

- Does the author convey an understanding of the philosophical tenants of phenomenology?
- Does the author have a clear “phenomenon” to study that is articulated in a concise way?
- Does the author use procedures of data analysis in phenomenology?
- Does the author convey the overall essence of the experience of the participants? Does this essence include a description of the experience and the context in which it occurred?
- Is the author reflexive throughout the study? (pp. 215-216)

The first two points of Creswell (2007) have been laid out thus far; the remaining three will now be addressed. I have created hand-written research logs that are dated, descriptive and topic specific. On July 17, 2008, I added another column recommended by Creswell (2007) that captured my personal reflections of thoughts, actions, and observations. This assisted in keeping a logical paper audit of steps I took and of the decision-making process. A record of the research log also suggests that if another researcher wanted to replicate this study, a researcher could do so clearly and concisely.

*Validity, reliability, and research bias.* Because the paradigm of quantitative research uses positivist terminology like validity, reliability, and research bias within its research constructs, it makes sense that a different form of research terminology would be used for qualitative research. One construct that is essential to qualitative research is

trustworthiness. To establish trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that a qualitative researcher uses terms like “credibility,” “authenticity,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “conformability” as equivalents to “internal validation,” “external validation,” “reliability” and “objectivity” (p. 300). There are various ways of accomplishing this level of rigor and trustworthiness. As a researcher, I demonstrated trustworthiness by using research logs, member checks, acknowledging subjectivity throughout the process, and providing a high level of research transparency (Patton, 2002). Guba (1981) acknowledges one indispensable way of using the research logs to document reflexivity is to “keep a continuing journal in which introspections are recorded daily” (p. 87). I have demonstrated this by using description and reflection in my journal recordings. These dated entries create an audit trail.

According to Guba (1981), the process of using member checks to reach agreement on the transcribed data is the “single most important action inquirers can take, for it goes to the heart of the credibility criterion” (p. 85). This study used member checks.

Interpretive phenomenology does not ask the researcher to bracket (separate) their own preconceptions or bias (Crist & Tanner, 2003). Instead, the researcher is examining the existing world of the participant who is situated in it and is viewed by participant and researcher (Crist & Tanner, 2003). Therefore, it is an emerging interpretation that never “loses sight of each informant’s particular story and context” (Crist & Tanner, 2003, p. 203). The truth I sought was not of one “independent and objective reality” but that of a world being untenable; that truth is dependent on language and language has a limited logical relation to reality (Rolfe, 2006, p. 8). Validity therefore being truth in a

qualitative sense, is about access to truth (Rolfe, 2006). Rolfe (2006) argues there is no way for sure we know if we as researchers have uncovered it, but we make attempts in moving as close as possible to the reality experienced by the participants.

Bias has been noted within my writing through personal reflexivity as it occurred. This shows itself in my journal and overall audit trail throughout the dissertation process (Guba, 1981). These stated biases and acknowledged limitations intentional and related to me as a person and researcher.

The findings of this study are considered context relevant, that is to suggest any transferability will be related to the thick description collected in the data from participants that resonates within the readers themselves (Guba, 1981). This thick description from participants' experiences can speak to the social scientific concerns we care about most (Soss, 2006). Thus, by using these verification strategies within the process, I may move beyond the question of rigor and provide "pragmatic scientific evidence" that can be integrated into "developing a scientific knowledge base" (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002, p. 13).

#### *Data Analysis and Interpretation*

In the tradition of Hermeneutic phenomenology, a different approach is taken toward analysis compared to just phenomenology. For instance, often in phenomenology, the term *essence* is used (Creswell, 2007). Essence within the phenomenon being studied is the "essential, invariant structure" that focuses on common experiences as shared by participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). Heidegger challenges this claim by questioning *how would we ever know if a statement is the one true essence or not?* Instead, Heidegger points the analysis in a different way, "a calling to

consideration” (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1395). I have looked for how participants understand the experience of reporting their child being bullied; what shows up as meaningful to the person shows up in the interview account. Heidegger (1962) explains it like this:

We must instead hold fast not only the phenomenal finding that I receive the call as coming both from me and from beyond me, but also to the implication that this phenomenon is here delineated ontologically as a phenomenon of *Dasein* (Being in the world). Only the existential constitution of *this* entity can afford us a clue for interpreting the kind of Being of the ‘it’ which does the calling. (p. 320)

Therefore, the thinking I have used to frame my analysis will be that of making participants’ understanding of what occurred explicit. To accomplish this form of hermeneutical phenomenology, I allowed myself large blocks of time and quiet space to live the readings, thinking about them, and write within my own state of being, accepting in trust, that emergence will eventually come (Smythe et al., 2008). The emergence is that which holds us when we read; the profound heart of the experience; the resonating aspect that gives understanding of meaning (Smythe et al., 2008).

This is where the hermeneutic circle comes into function. I have intentionally looked at the text that was making little to no sense—this is where new insight exists. That is when reading, thinking, and rereading come into play. This is a time when confusion may persist. From the waiting, the “ah-ha” moment may come. It is a moment of co-constitution or fusion between the participant’s knowing and the researcher’s understanding (Koch, 1995). It may come at any time or being in a situation that somehow makes clear understanding. This new understanding in meaning is immediately captured in tentative understanding.

I have worked with members of a hermeneutic circle of six scholars imbedded in Heideggerian hermeneutical research to review several of my transcripts. We have met bi-monthly on computer (Skype) to discuss different themes, explicated excerpts, exemplars, and paradigm cases. When reviewing transcripts, it can be known something unique may be at hand when an excerpt is read aloud; it will create silence in a room of listeners, thinkers. With Heideggerian hermeneutic research studies, the reader is to decide on the accuracy of the description (Smythe et al., 2008). Within that framework, I describe other aspects of data analysis that I will use in my analysis.

*Paradigm cases.* Analysis occurred by looking at paradigm cases, thematic analysis, and exemplars within the text (Benner, 1994). Paradigm cases are “strong instances of being in the world, doing a practice or taking up a project” (Benner, 1994, p. 113). According to Benner (1994) they are cases that are vibrant stories, unusually compelling, that draw the attention of the researcher as investigator to return and examine them from new perspectives. This paradigm case assists the researcher in creating a global understanding. The researcher then looks at how the participant moves from one topic to another, back to the story’s wholeness. This allowed me to check for incongruities, puzzles, mysteries, contradictions, and unifying thematic concerns. This case serves to revise an initial understanding into a deeper meaning of the phenomenon.

According to Benner (1994), once this paradigm case is found, when reading another case, the researcher explores questions such as:

“How would the Paradigm Case A [person] act or respond, or how would the act or event unfold in this situation? What would happen if the context were different? Would the same issues and concerns show up for the two cases? What events, concerns, and issues show up in Paradigm Case A that do not show up in Paradigm Case B?” (p. 113)

The paradigm case allows for comparison of similarities and differences between cases (Benner, 1994). This allows practical meanings and concerns to show up. There should be enough clear evidence to defend why these cases were chosen as paradigm cases.

*Exemplars.* Paradigm cases can be augmented by the use of exemplars.

Exemplars are salient excerpts that highlight a common theme and are common among participants (Crist & Tanner, 2003). They can also highlight contrasts between experiences. Benner (1994) suggests they often take the place of an operational definition in descriptive research by allowing the researcher to “demonstrate intents and concerns within contexts and situations in which the objective attributes of the situation might be quite different” (p. 117). These exemplars can be used as narrative highlights that illuminate a significant point of interest within the narrative (Benner, 1994).

*Themes.* It is important to note that exemplars and paradigm cases are used to highlight themes; that is to say they are ways to communicate themes so the reader is drawn into the analysis (Smythe et al., 2008). Themes are not necessarily the same idea said repeatedly by different participants. Instead, Smythe and colleagues (2008) argue themes are an understanding that I as researcher, have seen something that matters significantly, something that I wish to “point the reader towards” (p. 1393). It is a way to show what I am seeing or hearing in the text--what the participant is signaling me toward (Smythe et al., 2008).

In using thematic analysis as a tool to uncover meaningful patterns, stances, or concerns, the researcher moves back and forth in and from portions of the text. Benner (1994) suggests the shifting between texts and parts and the whole of the text allows the researcher to confront new interpretive questions. Thematic analysis may be considered



a means to get at the phenomenon we are addressing (Benner, 1994). This process of discovery may show itself in inconsistencies and incoherent parts. It may also show itself with a gap between the participants' ideologies and beliefs and actual practices (Benner, 1994). Thus, the "finding" becomes an invitation for you the reader to come and think along with me as researcher and participant as gift giver (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1393). Lastly, it is important to distinguish patterns from themes when analyzing phenomenological work. When on the path to find meaning, the researcher sees themes resonate by way of meaning and significance in creating understanding, and not by volume or amount. Patterns therefore, hook themes together and focus on the summary (Crist & Tanner, 2003).

### *Reflexive Being on Heidegger*

Often is the case with great minds, dichotomies exist in their own way of being. Heidegger stands accused, and with convincing evidence, of supporting the Nazi party as it rose to German power in the early 1930s. Heidegger, being a strong German nationalist, may have believed the Nazi party could restore Germany to social and economic prominence. This criticism of support during and silence after Nazi Germany's 13-year reign of terror often followed Heidegger. Babich (1992) questions if Heidegger's "terrible silence on the matter should have been treated as a crime" (p. 88). However, in Heidegger's silence, he leaves me thinking. I as researcher keep thinking about him as philosopher, scholar, and as being. How could such a reflective thinker, with such intellect and connection to existentialism, allow and permit these systematic, genocidal acts? By my asking, I am rediscovering the acts, the acts of systematic targeting of a religious/ethnic groups. I am rediscovering the Jewish people as scapegoat, as they have

been before, during, and after Hitler's reign of terror. I am rediscovering how different parts of humanity responded—or did not respond to this prolonged and repeated brutality of genocide. Heidegger's intentional silence during and after the systematic killings had taken place, keeps me coming back, thinking about, and questioning his response. I find this an existential dilemma in my understanding of Heidegger. By my continually going back to the scene, going back to Heidegger, I once again am brought to question how a person interested in understanding and interpreting human experiences, who uses terms like *breakdown* to understand human existence, and co constructs interpretation of knowing, could consciously allow the act of systemic killing of millions to continue—without his own *a call to consciousness*.

Heidegger's response to the genocide remains unanswered and leaves me deeply saddened, unsettled, even grieving. His response, by remaining silent is the answer. The context of my sadness, unsettledness, and grievance are connected to my own process of acknowledgement; a process that begins addressing an error that I perceive has caused harm. My thinking in this sense is family, culturally, and religiously based. However, there is no excuse for Heidegger in this context. With a background of growing up Catholic in Germany, and studying catholic religious texts, his awareness of acknowledgement and forgiveness was in front of him all along. I am left with my own reflection of self: What does my choosing Heidegger's philosophical stance and method in approaching phenomenology say about me as being?

In my steps of reconciliation, I have concluded that what Heidegger contributed philosophically to phenomenology, I embrace. He gives me constructs that allow me to acquire knowledge in a systematic way that provides unique understanding ontologically.

He personally, in my consciousness, remains a terribly flawed being. I wonder what new understandings Heidegger himself may have come up with from interviewing himself and answering questions regarding his lived-experience as a supporter of the Nazi party while *being in the world*. Thus, I accept the greatness of his philosophy, and his remarkably flawed character in being Being.

### *Disclosures of Bias*

Interpretive researchers know that they have “biases and blind spots” that affect and direct the questions they ask participants (Benner, 1994). Many of my biases exist from the standpoint of personal experiences relevant to this study topic. As a white male, I have worked in over 20 schools and five rural school districts within the state of Michigan. I have also served as a consultant for a large metropolitan school system for system wide anti-bullying programming in Indiana. Experience as a school social worker has given me insight into teachers, parents, principals, school aides, and school systems. In providing services to public school students ranging from five to 21 years of age, I have met and worked with parents and school personnel individually, small groups, and committees. I also held an elected teacher’s union position for two years. I was bullied in my role as a social worker by a coworker (teacher) who was a close friend to the school principal (my boss). I believe bullying can occur on any level, in any position, in subtle and not so subtle ways.

During the last four years of my tenure, I evolved as the middle school anti-bullying person, providing classroom interactive workshops. The position also allowed me to work directly, individually and in groups of ten, with students who were being bullied. I had systematic ways of working with victims and bullies in holding the bully

accountable while providing protection to the victim. I am sorry to say, I rarely called the parents of the bully and took care of the situation between bully and victim. The school system had a school handbook that seemed more symbolic than an actual blueprint of what adults adhered to when bullying occurred.

I chose to leave my tenured position as school social worker and pursue a PhD in social work with no intention in studying bullying. This however, Heidegger might suggest, as my past always being in front of me. My past as a middle school student who bullied and was a victim lasted until eleventh grade. These and other experiences have informed my questions for this study.

I believe bullying to be a process that occurs through behavioral reinforcement or reenacting the need for power by controlling others psychologically or physically. I believe that generally, victims struggle with knowing how to respond to a bully and often fear that any action taken can make the persecution worse. This fear of making their situation worse may be a result of botched attempts by adults to intervene. Other messages the victim may have received, such as “don’t worry about it,” “just ignore it,” or “okay, I’ll take care of it,” have resulted in no definite assurance the situation was addressed. The fear and shame of not being able to stop the bullying are what students are trapped in experiencing. The parent who decides to report to a school official, perhaps seen as the final line of defense, is at the mercy of the school official for intervention.

Prior to the interviews, I believed parents reporting a bullying incident to a school official would be helpful in getting the bullying to stop. However, the process may be slow and the outcome may take a toll on the relationship the parent develops with the

school official because of the reporting. I had a bias that a minority of participants would perceive a school official taking action that quickly ended the bullying. This may be due to the multiple demands placed on administrators and the multiple ways a bully and cast can perform harm-doing onto the victim.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS

While examining the transcripts of interviews conducted for this study, I identified prevalent patterns within parenting a middle school child who is being bullied. For purposes of highlighting the sequence that was found, I will refer to these patterns as stages. In the first stage, parents reported the experience of *discovering* their child's being bullied. In the second stage, parents described the experience of *reporting* their discovery of bullying to school officials. In the final stage, the *aftermath* of what parents experienced as a result of reporting the bullying is described. Together, these three stages describe the trajectory of parenting experiences encountered when a middle school child is being bullied. Each stage occurred within the context of an Indiana anti-bullying law (Appendix E). The Indiana state law includes a definition of bullying, training of school personnel through state grants on prevention and disciplining bullying, and having each school corporation establish a safe school committee that addresses bullying.

#### *Context of Interpretation*

The findings were analyzed using Heideggerian hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology. Interpretive phenomenology goes beyond description of core concepts, essences, and what participants consciously know and instead focuses on “meanings embedded in common life practices” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 728). These meanings are a “derivative of the understanding” (Plager, 1994, p. 72). Therefore, the meanings are what parents share as their understanding of walking through specific phenomena.

Heideggerian hermeneutics intends to reveal what has been concealed in the day-to-day experiences of parents who have middle school age children who have been

bullied. The common life practices that parents use in each stage will be shown using exemplars. Previous studies will be incorporated (Leonard, 1994) to explain gaps between the current study and what is already known.

In revealing day-to-day practices, it is the researcher's responsibility in interpretive phenomenology to acknowledge the context of engaging in an act of co-constitutionality (Koch, 1995; Lopez & Willis, 2004). According to Lopez and Willis, co-constitutionality of knowledge is comprised of "meanings that the researcher arrives at in interpretive phenomenology and are a blend of meanings articulated by both participant and researcher...referred to as the fusion of horizons" (p. 730). Therefore, parents and the researcher demonstrate meaning when parents tell of their experiences in *being-in-the-world* as parents of bullied youth.

Being in the world, as Heidegger (1962) reminds us, always has a context. The context is a situational context: we are not experiencing absolute freedom but are each in a "situated freedom" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729). In situated freedom, participants and the researcher find themselves experiencing and understanding through the lens of social, cultural, and political contexts. Therefore, truth is contextual and, for parents, shows up as truth in their own lives (Nelms, 1996). A demographics chart of parents in this study begins to provide these participants' contexts:

Table 3: Bullying Demographics of Study Participants

	Prior involvement in child's middle school?	Grade child started in school district?	Grade during interview?	Types of bullying?	Parent born in community?
Tom's Mom & Dad	Yes	3rd	6th	V, PH, RE	No
Chelsea's Mom	Yes	5th	9th	V	No
Sandra's Mom	Yes	PS	8th	V	No
Elizabeth's Mom	Yes	KG	7th	V	Yes
Marcy's Mom	Yes	8th	6th	V, PH, CY	Yes
Rachel's Mom	No	7th	11th	V, PH, RE	No
Jack's Mom	Yes	7th	8th	PH	No
Sadie's Mom	No	7th	7th	V	No
Maureen's Mom	Yes	1st	9th	V, PH	No
Anna's Mom	Yes	KG	9th	V, RE	No

*V = Verbal; PH = Physical; RE = Relational; CY = Cyber; PS = Preschool; KG =*

*Kindergarten*



*Stage One: Parents' Discovery That Their Child Is Being Bullied*

In using interpretive phenomenology, Heidegger suggests enriching our senses through the use of metaphor to convey our new understandings (Cazeaux, 2007). I found it was useful to describe the experience of parenting through each stage of the bullying process using the metaphor of a parent protecting a child from a severe storm. In the discovery stage, the parent notices subtle changes in the weather that become noticed; the wind begins to shift and blow with increasing force. The sky shifts suddenly from light to dark, blocking light with dark clouds. The trees in the yard sway and bend with threat of breakage. As these changes occur, the parent begins to take the usual precautions when a storm is approaching by alerting the child to close windows, take in yard chairs, and not to be caught in the storm. This process of responding to weather changes occurring from the external forces of a storm is similar to the parents falling back on their usual repertoire of parenting skills when they first discover their child is being bullied.

*First Signs*

The winds of change that bullying brought into a family came out of nowhere. Tom and his family moved to his new suburban home in a higher socioeconomic community during Tom's third grade year because his parents believed that the new school would provide a high quality education for Tom and his younger sister. Tom's dad is a middle school math teacher and his mom is an elementary school librarian; both work outside of their home school district. The revelation of concealed bullying occurred when Tom's father was asking Tom about his day at school.

Tom's dad: We were completely blind-sided, (pause) because he came from 2<sup>nd</sup> grade [at] W township school. Then had a good year in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

with X [new] school, so then when 4<sup>th</sup> grade happened, we just expected it was good...And we would always ask him like “How was school today?” “Good.” “Great.” Basically, we just happened to ask that one extra quick follow-up question of ‘why was it good?’ And then, it was kinda [like] the doors just opened...and the magnitude and the level it was happening, we were just--

J.B.: The follow-up question about “the door just opened,” could you explain what happened in that situation with that follow up question.

Tom’s mom: His first response is always “it’s all fine, it’s all good.” He doesn’t want to talk about it and doesn’t want to revisit it. He just says everything’s good. So [his dad] would start asking—...Have to start asking more complicated questions that take more than a yes or no to answer.

Tom’s dad: And we would say: ‘What made it so good today? Who did you play with today at recess?’ Or ‘what made it good?’ I think it was basically we asked who did he play with today and he said--

Tom’s mom: “Nobody”

Tom’s dad: He said “Nobody,” and we were like, ‘Why?’ “Well, nobody wants to play with me because” and we started finding out that it wasn’t just one or two kids, but it was almost a mob mentality where these kids were much more savvy than what we had realized and what the school even had any awareness of.

Analyzing this transcript required me to reflect on what Heidegger had to say about how individuals engage with their world. Below are the three primary modes of engagement with practical activity in Heideggerian understanding (Plager, 1994).

Table 4: Heidegger’s Modes of Engagement

<i>Ready-to-hand involvement</i>	The day-by-day functioning of object or Being that is working fine. This interaction is often taken for granted and therefore goes unnoticed. “Business as usual.”
<i>Unready-to-hand involvement</i>	A breakdown occurs in normal everyday involvement with an object or Being so that “normal” activity is no longer effective. Functioning becomes conspicuous and therefore because of the breakdown, noticeable. “What’s wrong here?”
<i>Present-to-hand involvement</i>	Practical everyday activity ceases. The participant stands back to observe and reflect (situation independent) critically on the broken object/situation or Being. The participant has to think abstractly in analyzing toward a solution to the problem. “How do I fix it?”

We can apply these three modes of involvement to the situation of parenting a child who is being bullied. In the discovery stage, Tom’s parents are working in the ready-to-hand mode. Tom’s parents asked the usual questions and received the usual answers. When Tom’s father went beyond asking the routine “yes/no” questions and began asking specific questions such as “Who did you play with today at recess?” a breakdown occurred. The parents entered into the unready-to-hand mode of parenting.

Now that Tom's mistreatment by other children was realized, Tom's parents could no longer continue their "ready-to-hand" parenting but dwelled in the "unready-to-hand."

A similar blind-sided discovery occurred with Jack's mom, who progressed from the day-to-day ready-to-hand mode of parenting to discovering the bullying (i.e., breakdown), which resulted in the unready-to-hand. Jack's mom worked as a pediatric physician. She described her son as a big, athletic seventh grader who played hockey and football. Jack's mom was stunned to hear it was her son who was being bullied and not the other way around. Jack began the school year as being new to Indiana. Three of his peers bullied Jack in the gym locker room at his Catholic middle school. Jack's mom shared her surprise at this discovery:

Jack's mom: So, one day in early fall in the seventh grade, my youngest son Jack...I got a report from his sister and our nanny that he had come home upset and in tears...so he explained to us some of what happened, although not in detail. He explained that for the past few weeks to a month or more, in the locker room, during gym when they go into the locker room to change, there were three kids beating up on other kids: him being one of them that was getting kind of hit on where they would pull their hair, snap towels, use a belt to kind of hit. Two of the kids were bigger kids. One of the kids or perpetrators was a little kid but a really big pain in the neck...On that particular day, Jack had gotten very upset and had gotten hurt by it and left the locker room crying.

One of the girls in his class had known what was going on and told the teacher...The teacher kept Jack in the classroom at the end of the

school day and when my nanny went to pick him up, she [teacher] asked that the nanny pull over [the car] and wait. The teacher then came down and told my nanny what had happened and that it had been reported to the principal.

...That night, the nanny [Cindy] told us as much as she knew.

Jack didn't say a whole lot about it. He mentioned a little bit about it pretty much whatever Cindy [Nanny] had said; he did not elaborate on it. He did not give me much discussion about it, but obviously, he was really upset and very tearful and just did not want to discuss it.

J.B.: Before the reporting took place, what thoughts or actions occurred for you as a parent knowing that your child was being bullied?

Jack's mom: (shockingly expressed) Oh, I was very surprised! Jack was a new kid in the class so he entered into seventh grade and this is in the fall of seventh grade. He had been involved on the football team, he is one of the biggest kids in the class, he plays hockey. I really did not anticipate him being the bullied. I would assume he would more likely be the bully-er. So, I was surprised and shocked and a little pissed off that he hadn't defended himself more...because he easily could have taken any one of these kids, but he didn't, and that kind of surprised me. I was upset. I was upset that anybody would hurt my kid.

Jack's mom found it surprising that her son did not fight back. However, the context of Jack being submissive as a new kid in school as three bullies ganged up on

him may have created a physical and psychological power imbalance that by definition, is part of the bullying experience (Aalsma & Brown, 2008; Olweus, 2001).

The actions of school officials holding Jack after school, beginning an investigation, and reporting the bullying to the nanny were different from what happened with all of the other parents in this study. Jack's school officials had initially identified the situation as important. However, an investigation alone does not provide protection and does not provide the necessary information for parents to have peace of mind when their child is being bullied. Jack's mom explained:

Jack's mom: Ah, upsetting. Very upsetting and very frustrating. Like I say, kind of a surprise by the whole thing in the first place. I spent a very tearful night, let's just say, chatting about it with other parents and trying to find out what was going on and why.

Jack's mom continued in an unready-to-hand mode of knowing her son was being bullied and was doing her best to understand what would be done to protect her son. The principal did not call her to give the information about Jack's being bullied: This may not be uncommon. In fact, in my personal examination of the 40 states which have "anti-bullying laws," only eight states clearly require that a school official notify parents in cases of substantiated bullying. Indiana is not one of those states.

### *Recognizing a Child's Pain*

Another way parents discovered their child being bullied occurred as parents monitored their child's day-to-day behavior. Through monitoring, behaviors showed up that were not part of the child's day-to-day demeanor. Often for participants, parents' first discovery of bullying occurred before middle school.

Table 5: Parents First Awareness of Child Being Bullied

Child	Grade When Bullying Started	Grade When First Reported to School Official
Tom	4th	4th
Chelsea	5th	7th
Sandra	Preschool	6th
Elizabeth	4th	4th
Marcy	4th	6th
Rachel	8th	8th
Jack	7th	7th
Sadie	7th	7th
Maureen	7th	7th
Anna	4th	6th

Chelsea's mom is a university administrator and her father is a lawyer. Chelsea attended a private Christian school until fifth grade. Her new public school presented a safe, reassuring appearance in part by presenting anti-bullying messages on the wall. As Chelsea's mom shared, "They had anti-bullying posters everywhere." However, after Chelsea entered her new school, her behavior at home changed.

Chelsea's mom: The reason that we started looking into it [bullying], she hadn't told us that she was being bullied but she started kicking our cat. We couldn't figure out what was going wrong--

J.B.: With the cat?

Chelsea's mom: Why she was kicking the cat. It was an outward behavior on her part because it was something that was wrong and she didn't want to tell us directly that she was being bullied or she didn't know how to word or phrase it. So we finally got to the bottom of that because you know her cat is a prize possession (laughter).

J.B.: When you saw this it was like 'where's this coming from' kind of thing.

Chelsea's mom: It was definitely a red flag for us. As we talked to her a little bit more about it, we found out was going on...

Chelsea's actions spoke louder than words. Her projection of anger onto her "prized possession" was an indicator to her parents of something amiss. The action by their daughter quickly brought them to a breakdown of their everyday parenting to move from ready-to-hand to an unready-to-hand mode.



This early recognition of being bullied (before entering middle school) by Chelsea's mom and five other parents in this study did nothing to stop it from reemerging later in the child's middle school career. These parents came into the study to report middle school bullying of their child, yet several found that the history of their child's victimization reached back to elementary school. Sandra's mom, an elementary teacher in a district outside of her daughter's school, shared the re-emerging breakdown she and her daughter have faced:

Sandra's mom: Actually, the first time my daughter was being bullied she was being called names. Lesbian and...it was on the basketball court; she played basketball on a traveling team as well as the school team and that started in sixth grade. She is now in the eighth grade...Actually, this has been going on since preschool from little petty stuff that has escalated to text messaging, actually chasing her home, that they were going to beat her up, threatening to beat her up.

In this case, Sandra's mom's traced her daughters ongoing victimization back to preschool. As Humphrey and Crisp (2008) suggest, even when kindergarten parents report school bullying of their child early in their school career, it may go unsubstantiated, even unacknowledged. The reported impact found on some Australian parents were feelings of anger, powerlessness, and a sense of an inability to effectively fulfill the role of parent toward their bullied child (Humphrey & Crisp, 2008).

#### *Child's Call for Help*

School by design separates a child from his or her parents. Yet technology can be a tool that allows for connection during the separation. Maureen's mom, a university

administrator, found technology as a way of discovering and taking a step back to see her daughter's bullying. She became aware of her daughter's victimization as her daughter rode home on the bus from an affluent public suburban middle school. This came as unexpected.

Maureen's mom: Yes, my daughter was in middle school and she was a seventh grader. She now is a freshman so that's been two years ago. And she would come home and tell us how horrible the bus experience was on the way home in particular. And we talked a little bit about that... what was happening on the bus, what were the kids doing, and basically they were name calling and making fun of her size: she is a little larger child. And so there were some boys and even a couple girls who were really mean to her and singled her out on a daily basis. And so she was getting increasingly frustrated and in fact, one day text messaged me from the bus. I was at home, technology's a beautiful thing (smiles), and said to me the little text messages said "you have no idea what I go through on the bus." And I thought, there was something about seeing it on the text message that I was like, you know, she is really being tortured.

Maureen's mother illustrates what Heidegger (1962) refers to as the third mode of present-to-hand. Although she was aware of the bullying, she became purposeful in rethinking what she was doing as a parent to protect her child.

In discovering their child was being bullied, parents often shared their cultural and historical wisdom with their child. Heidegger (1962) suggests *Being* "is its past, whether explicitly or not" (p. 41). Therefore, one way parents often brought their

understanding, which was grounded from the past, to the forefront was in the form of advice. As an initial response to the discovery, giving advice was often what parents did to respond to their child's being the victim. The advice was intended to address the child's emotional reactions while reestablishing the parents' ready-to-hand mode.

*Parental Advice for the Bullied Child.* After the discovery of bullying, seven parents in this study responded to their child by giving advice. Two exemplars illustrate this approach.

Elizabeth's mom was a recently divorced parent of her daughter and older teenage son. Elizabeth's mom managed a medical office in a rural town in Indiana.

She reported her initial advice-giving in her attempt to reestablish ready-to-hand:

Elizabeth's mom: You know, I just tried to tell my daughter to be kind to them, you don't have to hang with them, don't (pause) basically I told her to ignore it. Just don't worry about it, be nice and move on; don't let it bother you.

Other parents described similar responses in trying to reestablish ready-to-hand.

Chelsea's mom explained her responses to her daughter dealing with the bully:

I think when she first talked to us about it, it was hard for us to accept it. It's kind of a tough pill to swallow that your child is being bullied enough to affect school work and home life and emotional stability. We thought it would go away. We thought if we gave her those kinds of things [advice] to deal with it that she [bully] might stop.

J.B.: Okay, so in the sixth grade it was kind of just knowing it was going on and maybe working through some of that.

Chelsea's mom: Yeah, trying to encourage her to take some different steps to try to deal with it.

These steps Chelsea's mom reports are all designed to move from the unready-to-hand back to ready-to-hand.

J.B.: Do you remember some of those steps that you may have encouraged her to use?

Chelsea's mom: Yes. We first of all tried to encourage her to ignore it, to walk away, and that didn't seem to work. And we encouraged her to try to be nice to her, and compliment her, and that didn't work. So, short of punching her in the face (laughter), we didn't want her to do that!

Sometimes you feel like you should just let them do that just to get it resolved, but (pause) but those things didn't work. She would walk away and the girl [bully] would follow behind her so it just continued, and I think she was frustrated because she didn't have any kind of a tool to fight back with or to take recourse.

Chelsea's mom uncovered the steps leading up to giving advice to her child.

These attempts to reestablish the ready-to-hand following the discovery of bullying had several steps. First came the difficulty she as a parent had when her daughter acknowledged the bullying. As Chelsea's mom described, the acceptance of bullying by her as a parent was a "tough pill to swallow" because of the widespread consequences such as affecting her schoolwork, home life, and emotional stability. Second, offering her daughter advice did not make the bullying "go away." However, there was also a brief moment when Chelsea's mom did seem to contemplate her daughter fighting the

bully as a means of ending the bullying. Although laughter was used to perhaps mask some contemplation, this is an important cultural aspect that emerged: How does culture dictate advice in proceeding with a bully?

In this interpretation, I reach beyond what was said to understand acceptable and unacceptable behavior that culturally influenced Chelsea's mom when she explained, "So, short of punching her in the face, we didn't want her to do that! Sometimes you feel like you should just let them do that to get it resolved, but those things didn't work." The struggle for her as a parent to give permission to fight the bully to "get it resolved" was not permissible, even as the prolonged harm continued.

Lastly, Chelsea's mom wants to equip her child with "a tool," capable of ending her daughter's state of unrest and parent's mode of present-to-hand.

*Parent compassion toward the bully.* For Anna's mom, giving advice showed itself in the form of directing compassion toward the bully. This response suggests Anna's mom was observing and reflecting critically and therefore, in the present-to-hand mode:

Anna's mom: My daughter has naturally curly hair and you know and Anna used to come home and make comments that "Oh, Nelly said this" or she called my daughter "Barbed wire" just all kinds of things: it's every other day. I kind of felt you know, like 'Hey Anna, you know, her father abandoned her and you know, you have a better life; just try to buck up and get through it' and so on.

However, even infrequent amounts of victimization for males or females can have long-term psycho-social consequences (Nansel et al., 2001). Therefore, the advice,

although well-intended from parents to “tough it out,” “be kind to them” “don’t worry about it” or “just ignore it” led to the parental discovery that compassion for the bully merely led to further victimization not only by the bully but also by the parents themselves. By not addressing the fullness of the harm-doing, parents often put the problem and responsibility of fixing the bullying situation back on the victim as a way of temporarily restoring parents’ ready-to-hand.

*Victim as Responsible*

Anna’s mom found herself directing the responsibility of being bullied back onto her daughter: “You need to figure out how to make it work.” Parents’ advice in practice to “make it work” never actually worked. Anna’s mom gives a glimpse of where her advice-giving came from:

Anna’s mom: And I grew up seeing triangles: don't like them, saw them. In the morning, one of my sisters and I could be on the same page, and by lunch time there was a whole different thing going on and it was constantly changing...However, both of my parents were military, so there was no tolerance for anything past maybe verbal teasing, okay? They were very disciplined; they had to be. And we went to parochial schools so that was another (laughter) kinda of you know, kind of rigorous and disciplined environment. So you had to figure out how to deal with somebody even if it came down to not speaking to them for a day or so, whatever, you had to figure something.

As Heidegger (1962) would suggest, Anna’s mom’s past is in front of her. Anna’s mom, in recalling her past, brings forth the meaning of her own advice-giving.

Anna's mom shows that she has stood back and reflected upon the present-to-hand parts of conflict from her youth. Anna's mom's recollection of her past has the context of a structured environment that allowed her as a child to work through family conflicts. For Anna's mom, anything outside of the parent, home, or school expectations would provoke immediate adult attention and intervention. These life lessons of having to "figure out how to deal with somebody even if" was a template that Anna's mom and other parents often experienced within a structure. However, the context of her daughter's victimization experience has a different structure and historical context.

Anna is apart from her mother in both time and place: she is in a different life space, especially when at school. Anna's mom's experience in childhood served in keeping her family and school relationships pointing toward the maintenance of making it work as ready-to-hand. Although Anna's mom was seeing her daughter's victimization through her own cultural and historical context, she was able to rethink (present-to-hand) Anna's situation as different from her own. Recognizing her daughter's own emotional pain triggered the parent's breakdown in parenting as present-to-hand. This rethinking came about because Anna, like Chelsea's mom, sees her daughter's emotional stability in a state of breakdown. This mode of present-to-hand for Anna's mom led to further attempts to protect her daughter:

And that's what I was trying to get across to her [daughter]. But what she was starting to do is internalize it because, you know, what was she going to do? So then, after, when I went and reported it, it was to the point where it was every day. And she would get off the bus route where I would pick her up and she would just be furious about the circumstance.

So I said, 'okay, this is it.' So, I went in and talked to the guidance counselor...

*Personal reflexivity.* As parents shared how they never asked their child to fight back, I began to wonder how contextually social class and race influenced this decision. The influence of norms, mores, and expectations of class and race, perhaps influencing the parent not to tell their child to fight back or have a good friend intercede on their behalf, was not offered to me by the parents. I wished I had started the study with more of an awareness of my curiosity. This curiosity was further peaked by an African American television news reporter who called me for an interview. He shared that he tells his children "Don't let anyone see you as weak." He told of his belief that if other youth saw any of his children as weak, they would be taken advantage of, victimized. The best way he believed to stop that from happening was to fight back quickly and as necessary. I wondered for the parents in my study if they too wished they could tell their children that message, but through different cultural contexts, were prohibited.

*A parental shift in responding.* In the initial discovery, Maureen's mom responded in a way that she found regrettable, even though short-lived. The discovery of her daughter being bullied led her as a parent to respond from the present-at-hand mode that initially blamed her daughter for being bullied. However, parents' attitudes are not fixed but are capable of shifting as new information becomes understood. Maureen's mom shared how a book provided guidance for her as a parent in responding to her daughter being bullied:

My daughter has had prior bullying experiences that were not really on school grounds. At that time, I read the great [book] *Odd Girl Out* and I



changed my approach a little bit to bullying. I've learned about—I said some of the typical dumb things I don't think you should say as a parent as your kid is being bullied like, “What's going on with you? Did something happen where one of the girls got upset by something you said?” I was trying to figure out like, by asking her all these questions about what she did in some way, I gave her the message that maybe she is to blame for getting bullied. Kinda like that whole (shifts into a deep, authoritative voice) “What are you doing to make your husband beat you?” and I, and I realized what a stupid thing to say.

Maureen's mom found a new perspective in providing support to her child. The new perspective identified her initial response as harmful. The new information provided a stance for Maureen's mom to respond in a protective manner. Although the book was a useful tool, it provided little to stop the bullies on the school bus (“We had hopes that it would stop, but it didn't”). It did allow Maureen's mom to begin to rethink her daughter's victimization from a new perspective.

The increased symptoms parents saw in their children as a result of being bullied led to shifts away from giving advice into a new level of response: reporting to a school official. Ultimately, when they had exhausted their own ready-to-hand mode of parenting, parents of bullied middle school children entered the unready-to-hand mode of parenting and sought additional support through their child's school officials. Going back to our analogy of a severe storm, parents do all they can on their own to protect their child and keep them safe. However, when the storm continues to rage, they had to

consult professionals for guidance. The next logical step for the parents was to report the situation to school officials.

*Stage Two: Reporting Bullying to School Officials*

*In the eye of the storm, the winds settle down and the emergence of hope sets in. Although broken limbs and other debris remain across one's landscape, the ability to go outdoors suggests the storm is now under control, or is it? A parent in the eye of the storm may do what his or her parent has done in the past: tune in to the weather station for advice on future understanding in weathering the storm upon its return. The station reports the storm is isolated in certain regions. Suddenly, from far away, the weather siren begins to blare. What you thought may have passed shows signs of coming back yet again.*

The second stage of parents' trajectory relates to their experiences when reporting bullying to school officials. Heidegger would consider the act of reporting by parents a concerned activity, which is an action that is projected toward a specific goal or purpose (Koschmann, Kuuti, & Hickman, 1998). The parents who understood that their advice was ineffective in bringing an end to their child's torment, chose to step back and reflect in the present-to-hand mode. This mode allowed them to understand that when their first attempts in advice giving were ineffective, they needed another way to critically respond to the broken situation. When parents saw the bullying had affected their child in a spectrum of severity, they were left with trying to fix the situation. These parents now turned their attention to restore ready-to-hand living. The intended purposes of reporting showed that parents wanted to make school officials aware of and intercede on behalf of their child.

In this first instance of parents contacting school officials, I will begin with a parent's positive experience. This positive experience allows comparisons when reviewing other parents' experiences in the sample that reported, but failed to stop the bullying.

### *A Parent Calls for Help*

In the first stage, Jack's mom came home from work and discovered through her daughter and nanny that Jack was being physically bullied for approximately a month in the gym locker room. Jack's mom spoke with Jack but failed to get any additional information. Afterwards, she placed a phone call to an assigned parent mentor (a family that has a student in Jack's class). After that call, Jack's mom went further to pursue understanding of what was being done.

Jack's mom: We get a little book with all the phone numbers [of students, teachers, and administrators] in it, and I very rarely call teachers, but I did call her to get an idea or an explanation about what was going on. And she was very good too, ...she's the one [first school official] that had found out what was happening so she had explained everything that she knew and what the steps were that were being taken.

Jack's mom received concrete information by calling Jack's teacher: "The steps." These steps became a specific pathway for her current and future understanding.

Jack's mom: So later on that night, I called and left a message for the principal to call me the next morning.

So the next day, the principal interviewed each of the children involved, each of the boys involved, including my son. He then made

them all come into his office together and explain, had Jack explain, how it felt to be picked on. He also had the boys express that they were sorry for what they did and why. He also had each of the boys write the parents [of the victim] a letter--

J.B.: Wow (whispered)

Jack's mom: --saying that they were sorry for what had happened and that it would not happen again and all that. They reviewed the locker room with the archdiocese...It was determined again that legally they could not have somebody in the locker room. So, the policy wasn't able to be changed, but the P.E. teacher took all the boys aside and went over what the protocols would be and explained that if they see that kind of behavior again, they need to report it to him right away. The kids should feel comfortable about telling them faster and that kind of thing.

J.B.: As this was occurring, were there ways you considered you might address the situation?

Jack's mom: I, this thing, happened relatively quickly and in a short time span. So the way I addressed it first was to call the people that I knew to be involved—the people at the school that were in a position of authority. The first, another parent, just to get an idea if they knew of anything, plus then the teacher, then the principal. Probably the only other thing I wanted to do but didn't was to contact the individual [bullies'] parents.

Jack's mom, blind-sided by her son being a victim of bullies, reached out to certain members of the school community. This access to a usable resource—the school

phone book—provided by the school allowed communication after school hours to a parent, Jack’s teacher, and the principal. Although Jack’s mom did have reassurance from Jack’s teacher of “what the steps were that were being taken,” it did not yet provide the peace of mind she sought regarding her son’s victimization.

*Assurances.* As Jack’s mom’s contact with the teacher progressed, she was given assurances that an investigation was being conducted. The next day, the principal exemplified this not just by word, but also by deed:

Jack’s mom: The principal contacted me after he had gotten the information after he had chatted with the kids. So that he wasn’t just taking my word for it. He had actually investigated it. He was very up front about (pause) with what changes could not be made...what could and could not be done as a possible solution, and they had actually looked into the various policies and the dioceses. So at least you know, I knew this wasn’t just, “this is one incident” but what could be done in the future; it had been looked at and addressed.

*Providing intervention.* The school officials provided a system of intervention for Jack and his mom. The bullying situation had been handled properly on several levels. The principal did not just take her “word for it. He had actually investigated it.” However, unless acted upon, knowledge only serves as knowledge, not action. Therefore, the following illustrates the specific steps or procedures Jack’s principal took to intervene and end the bullying within a 24-hour period of it being reported:

- A. The principal investigated each child involved in the bullying incident individually.
- B. The principal had each child involved listen to Jack and apologize to him for what had been done.
- C. The principal called each parent and had each child explain the bullying situation to their own parent.
- D. The Principal asked each child involved to write a letter to Jack's mom apologizing for what he had done and state why it would not happen again.
- E. The principal had the gym teacher address the situation with students and talk about future procedures in reporting.
- F. The principal checked with the archdiocese to review the policy of no adult in the locker room during dressing.
- G. The principal phoned Jack's mom and explained the details of the process and their outcome regarding the investigation and intervention.

One initial step the school official did not provide that would have been helpful according to Jack's mom:

I think it would have been helpful had the teacher or principal at least called and left a message or something that said "I'm aware of this. I have a plan of action for tomorrow." Because it left me with a night of what was going on.

Jack's mom received something in the mail from the students involved something that she did not expect: "I hadn't anticipated the [apology] letters from the kids. I appreciated that."

The letters provided something above and beyond what she expected. Although Jack's mom was unable to retrieve the letters for this study, she and her son had kept the letters.

Jack's mom provides a paradigm case for understanding how bullying can be successfully handled when brought to the attention of school officials. In this case, the school officials enacted practices that worked in a day-to-day situation of school bullying. This resulted in Jack's recovery from being a victim to reestablishing himself as a student who was no longer under attack. This experience was distinctly different from that of other parents. Unfortunately, all the other parents in this study reported that their experiences in reporting to school officials were unsuccessful and left them in a state of having to rethink what to do next in protecting their child from further bullying. *"The loop never got closed"*

Elizabeth's mom was an office manager at a dentist office. Elizabeth and her older brother have lived in the community all their lives. Elizabeth's mom was recently divorced and the children lived with her. When the bullying first emerged for her daughter in fourth grade, school officials told her to work it out with the bully's parent, who was the elementary school counselor. This intervention attempt worked only short term, and then the bullying reemerged in seventh grade with cyber bullying added to the verbal bullying. Elizabeth's mother described the first contact with the middle school:

Elizabeth's mom: I made a phone call on a Monday morning and spoke to the Student Service Representative (S.S.R.), I guess she is called. I told her that my daughter Elizabeth had her cell phone and that she would be bringing it down to her to listen, and that this is what happened, and she then told me that she would "take care of it and get to the bottom of it,"

and that's the last I heard, until I had to call again on Friday as to what transpired...So they really never communicated back until I called them again.

J.B.: What did you take that as?

Elizabeth's mom: I was a little offended that maybe she [S.S.R.] didn't take it as serious as it should be. I was very disappointed in their system that she [S.S.R.] didn't call me back to let me know. As a concerned parent, I would think they would be grateful for us to care enough to call in and say "Hey we need to do something about this." I find our middle school is not very cooperative. They don't want a lot of parents to be involved, and I do not know if it's just a stage of the kids where they don't want parents there...

Elizabeth's mom shared her belief that reporting to the S.S.R. was not taken "as seriously as it should be." This understanding comes from the paradox of the S.S.R. stating that she would "take care of it and get the bottom of it," but not getting back to the parent. The lack of follow-through such as a call back to parents who report bullying signaled to parents that the school viewed the situation as not important.

Elizabeth's mom expresses disappointment in "the system." The school's stratified system has roles, obligations, and duties. The role of the S.S.R. was unclear. Does that person specifically provide student discipline, intervention, or counseling? How was that person connected or unconnected to the principal? Power as an act or symbol is often understood by titles, e.g., "school principal." Does a person fulfilling the role of Student Services Representative--or a school counselor, social worker or



psychiatrist--carry explicit or even implicit power necessary to do what was demonstrated by this school official? Therefore, with a school official other than a principal leading the investigation, a parent may be left with an incomplete intervention that leads to further victimization.

In every case in this study, parents who relied on school counselors (and an S.S.R.) for help ended up with the problem remaining unresolved. This issue emerged with Maureen's mom:

And like I said, she [counselor] did do all the appropriate things: whipped out her notepad and took down all the information, but then nothing. You know something may have happened, but we did not make her stick around to wait and see. They may have talked to the school, the bus driver—for all I know they may have done something, they—the loop never got closed with them telling us. We never took her back so for the rest of the school year she didn't have to go...I was a little disappointed that they didn't call in follow-up because I think that would have been on their part the prudent thing to do.

In this study, follow-up calls to parents were rare. Adding to the confusion, parents often showed uncertainty in the steps school officials were taking to address the bullying situation. When reporting to a school counselor, parents shared disappointment in not knowing if the principal was ever made aware of the bullying:

Chelsea's mom: Well, I would hope so if they [counselor] received reports of bullying, as part of their whole job, that they would make a report to a higher administration, sure. I know the assistant principal at the school

was the discipline principal so it may have gone to him but not any further, I don't know. I don't know what the line of command is for bullying.

J.B.: Did the counselor ever suggest to you that she did or would talk to the principal?

Chelsea's mom. No.

Elizabeth's mom further illustrates the communication dilemma:

I talked with the vice principal who I know personally who is going to be a principal next year and she was not aware of really anything. So I told her the whole scenario and (pause) she said, "Why didn't you just come to me?" I said, "Well when I called, these were the channels they [office secretaries] told me I had to go through."

Parents commonly expressed not knowing specifically to whom they should report bullying. This ambiguity within the system may have allowed parents to be connected with school officials who were incapable of providing a full intervention, thus allowing the bullying to continue.

#### *School Officials Unsuccessful Intervention*

Sandra's mom shared her experience when reporting bullying to her daughter's school officials:

Sandra's mom: (sigh) I think it was like a day after it happened because she went down to the guidance or the school nurse that her stomach was hurting. We found out the next day she had been bullied by Eva; [saying] that she was gay, that she was a lesbian. They had a basketball game and

they were in the locker room and I can't remember the exact words, but Eva was calling her a lesbian in the locker room...and saying this to the basketball team: "Well, guess what? We have a lesbian on our team named Sandra." So then, the girls began to isolate her [Sandra], and nobody would talk to her. Then when we confronted the principal about it and he said he would take care of it, but all that happened was the girls were called down and talked to, including my daughter. All of them were in the Guidance Office at the same time with the principal. I think it was just like a slap on the wrist, "don't do this." "Girls will be girls," is what we were told.

Here the cliché "Girls will be girls" is relied upon by school officials to explain or perhaps normalize the act of bullying among females.

Sandra's mom: I thought she [bully] would at least get Friday detention or get suspended or something. I didn't think getting sent back to class...So I thought the message was that it was okay. That they're teaching the kids that it's okay.

These actions by school officials did little to address the ongoing sexual harassment aimed at Sandra. Their actions did little to relieve the physical manifestations of Sandra's pain from the bullying. It did little to re-establish Sandra as a person with whom peers would allow themselves to be seen. Lastly, it did little to stop the bullying. It did communicate the message to Sandra's mom that bullying was "okay" and even normal. Compare this approach to Jack's mom's experience: nowhere was there any indication of bullying being minimized by school officials.

As the bullying continued, so did Sandra's mom's continuation to get school officials to follow the school hand book in responding to the bullies:

And they [the principals] keep repeating the same thing, "If it happens again, they are going to expel this girl." Okay, it's happened again, why isn't she being expelled? I show the evidence, and why isn't she expelled? "Well, this situation is a little different but..." How is this any different? It is still harassment and it is still bullying.

In this instance, Sandra's mom illustrates how her daughter's school officials back-off from the pursuit of applying consequences to the bully. Her daughter's sexual harassment continues without school officials being willing to assert the full measure of the discipline code on the bully. Elizabeth's mom states what matters most to her as a parent in this situation:

What matters to me is that they get a handle on it. It almost seems like some of these teachers and administrators are afraid of these girls so they don't want to deal with it. I guess just follow through you know. If you write these handbooks, and you expect the kids to follow the rules, then you know they need to follow through. If kids know they are going to be called out first time, maybe they wouldn't continue to do it.

Being "called out" was only found by Jack's mom. The principal's assertive stance toward the bullies did stop it from continuing.

*"No-Win Situation"*

Sadie's mom shared what occurred for her when she decided to report bullying to a school official:

She came home in tears, talking about how the kids being mean to her, making fun of her, calling her names. My biggest thing is when my child goes to school she is to get an education; nothing should stop that. So, I went into school and that is exactly what I told them, that she is being bullied that she is being made fun of, this is in the long run is going to affect her education and it has to stop.

Sadie's mom's expectation of her daughter's purpose in school is clear: "my child is to get an education; nothing should stop that."

Sadie's mom: Sadie is not a mean child. She is really kind of quiet, and this hurt her, and I was angry she was hurt. No parent wants their child hurt, especially when going to school...The bullying continued on the bus but started in school. So, I went into the school with her the next day and took her in myself, and when I went in to talk to the office, I sat there forever. There were so many other fights going on in the school, you know, and other things going on that there wasn't anyone to talk to me (laughter). So I sat there (laughter) for 35 or 40 minutes before anyone came to talk to me. As I was sitting there, I was getting more frustrated; you know, my child is sitting here beside me, she should be in class. They went and had me talk to the teacher that it was going on--

J.B.: Who is *they*?

Sadie's mom: It was the assistant principal at the school who sat me down to talk to me about it and said, "Let's go talk to the teacher where it

happened.” But when they do that, the teacher talks to the kids [bullies], and then the kids retaliated.

J.B.: Is that what happened?

Sadie’s mom: Yeah, the teacher (pause), I went to express to the teacher ‘this is what happened in your classroom.’ she said “I am aware of that, and I did what I could to stop it.” Then she sits and talks to the other children who were bullying Sadie, and they turn around and they are mad because Sadie is targeted as a tattletale, and then they go back to bullying her again (throws up her hands).

J.B.: So the principal had the teacher talk to the kids. What did you take this as?

Sadie’s mom: I took this as Sadie and I were both in a no-win situation because (pause) that was just going to make the kids mad because “her mom came in.” They looked at her as “mommy came in” and “you are a baby.” I thought it was ridiculous. I think parents should have been involved.

Although Sadie’s mom had reported the bullying directly to a principal, the principal, without assessing the full scope and magnitude of the bullying, deferred to Sadie’s teacher for the course of intervention. Sadie’s teacher acknowledged her awareness of bullying by stating, “I did what I could to stop it.” It is questionable how even the best-trained teacher can influence bullying that proceeds from the classroom onto the school bus. The principal placed the teacher in a position of protecting Sadie with limited power. Sadie’s mom acknowledged the principal’s response as placing her

and her daughter in a “no-win situation.” This situation led to more intense harm doing for Sadie by the bullies.

*Victim as the problem.* Tom’s mom described her perception of Tom’s middle school counselor, teacher, and administration as the reporting continued:

Tom’s mom: The more we tried to get the school to address it, the more adult staff seemed to consider Tom a problem or trouble. All this trouble followed Tom. So instead of perceiving him as a victim who needed care and protection, it was “why are you bothering me now, Tom?” The counselor in 6<sup>th</sup> grade said, “Tom, you have to come and see me as soon as these incidents happen so I can deal with it before something happens again or before a day goes by. We need to talk to people when it is fresh.” The teachers wouldn’t let Tom go to the counselor. He’d say, “I need to go see the counselor,” and they would refuse, they’d say, “No.”

The opening line of Tom’s mom narrative is telling: “The more we tried to get the school to address it, the more adult staff seemed to consider Tom a problem or trouble.” Tom and his parents experienced themselves as the problem with school officials; they did not perceive school officials seeing the bullies or their behaviors as the real problem.

Tom’s dad: ...And in one situation Tom explained to his teacher what happened. He saw a wallet in the hallway, and he went to pick it up and the kid tackled him, it was a set up. The kid tackled him, knocked him to the ground, and said, “Oh, I was just really protecting my wallet, I was afraid someone was going to take it.” Tom goes back to the teacher and the teacher says, “explain,” then scolds him saying, “Tom, you should

have known better than to do that; you just brought it onto yourself. Go sit down.” Or when Tom, during class, this kid would call Tom, a (pause) Tom did not know words like “dildo” or “blow job,” and Tom didn’t know what any of these things meant. He would come home every day and say, “Dad, what does this mean?”

Tom’s mom: “This is what they were calling me today, what does this mean?”

Tom’s dad: “I went to my math class and went and told my teacher,” and the kid would be called up and tell Tom, “Apologize to Tom” [kid] “I’m sorry.” And as soon as they walk out of the door in the hallway, it’s payback. And these kids were calling Tom a snitch or whatever else. I mean, I can’t even describe, on a daily basis, what Tom had to deal with.

Tom’s parents understood a protocol arranged by the school counselor. The protocol included steps necessary for Tom’s parents to have the bullying dealt with. However, in practice, school officials did not follow their protocol. As a result, Tom’s parents no longer felt they could protect their son despite school officials’ attempts to intervene. Sadie and her mom, like Tom and his parents, were in a no-win situation—the principal lacked involvement and was absent from the intervention. Tom’s parents experienced their own breakdown in parenting to keep Tom safe:

Tom’s dad: Well, I have to admit, I thought because I had taken grad classes with this woman [Tom’s middle school counselor] that I would get, because I was a known quantity, I thought that it would help. To tell you the truth, I really don’t have any problem with how the principal



handled this, or the counselor handled this. I think that we filed charges against the kid who struck Tom. What my issues were how things were handled were with the classroom teachers.

Tom's mom: Which part of that is the fact that the office though—

Tom's dad: The administration

Tom's mom: Because if Tom wasn't allowed to go see the counselor then obviously the counselor didn't inform the teachers of what was going on. Or if, if the principal and the counselor did inform the teachers they were being grossly insubordinate by continuing to treat Tom as if this wasn't a situation confirmed.

The gap between the counselor's message to Tom's parents of procedures the teachers will follow when Tom reports bullying and the actual responses are evident. The situational conditions that create this gap are for future investigation. However, Tom's mom and dad suggest perhaps a clear message was not given to teachers—often, in middle school, there are four to seven classroom teachers for the student depending on the school's structure. These multiple classroom teachers in a middle school make it difficult for administration, teaching staff, and students to all be on the same page (Stevens et al., 2000). Lastly, Tom's dad suggests the possibility of the teachers being “grossly insubordinate” toward doing what the counselor directed. The outcome was a continuation of Tom being bullied.

#### *Verbal Bullying Allowed*

Parents in this study noted the act of reporting bullying and including specifics for an investigation. Books and websites often recommend the importance of providing

school officials with the specifics of the who, what, where and when of the bullying (Dorn, 2006; High, 2009). However, as demonstrated by parents, the giving of such specific information does not suggest school officials' investigations lead to a full investigation or intervention, particularly regarding children being verbally bullied.

Chelsea's mom: It was then in seventh grade that, right toward the beginning of the year, because it looked like it was going to continue on, so I contacted the school counselor and made an appointment and went in to speak with her about the situation...I tried to give her specific examples. I gave her the name of the child. At that point she said she would "look into it a little further and we would go from there."

She had made contact with this one particular teacher, and they were going to see if the bullying occurred inside the classroom, which it did not; it was happening in the hallway. She pretty much told me at that point then because it was verbal, there was no physical bullying, it was verbal, it was in the hallway and could not be monitored, it could not be caught, that there was not anything they could do.

J.B.: Their counselor said this?

Chelsea's mom: Yeah [pause]. She said if it was a punch or a kick or a trip or anything like that, something they would have physical evidence for, or that a teacher could see, I mean (uncomfortable laughter). Of course, I'm thinking, 'What do we do now?'

The seriousness of how parents perceive verbal bullying and the harm it caused was different from school officials. Sandra's mom had a similar response from her daughter's school official about verbal bullying in the form of sexual harassment in class:

J.B.: How has this experience affected your perception of your child's school?

Sandra's mom: Not very safe. And I've made a point of saying that to him one time and he said, "Well, has she ever been touched?" You know what? Mentally is just as bad as physical. It is harder to determine, but it lasts a lot longer. I just wanted to hit him. I just wanted to hit him. And he and the assistant principal were standing there and said "well, we need to get out of the parking lot, the kids are getting ready to get out of school." They left my daughter and I just standing there. I had picked her up that day to go to another doctor's appointment and she was crying. I asked her what happened, and she said the bully called her a lesbian in front of everybody and then made fun of her. I said, 'I'm done with this shit.' I just went down the hall and my daughter said "Mom, this will just make it worse," and I said 'bull, I'm done with this shit.' When I got up to them they were both coming up to the office, the principal, and the assistant principal, and 'I need to talk to you!' and I pointed right to the principal. He stopped and said, "what's going on?" 'First of all, she doesn't feel very safe in here and I'm really sick of her being bullied when she's getting ready to leave.' "Well, what happened?" and I told him: 'This

is not a very safe school.' His comment was, "Well she's not being hit-- she's not being hurt."

Because the majority of bullying is delivered verbally (Dinkes et al., 2006; Nansel et al., 2001), the lack of "physical evidence" claimed by school officials would allow most instances of bullying to continue. This response was given Chelsea's mom and Sandra's mom despite Indiana's 2005 anti-bullying law that defines bullying as verbal, physical, and other:

AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2005]: Sec. 0.2. As used in this chapter,

"bullying" means overt, repeated acts or gestures, including:

- (1) verbal or written communications transmitted;
- (2) physical acts committed; or
- (3) any other behaviors committed;

by a student or group of students against another student with the intent to harass, ridicule, humiliate, intimidate, or harm the other student. (Wyss et al., 2005)

If school officials maintain that verbal, relational or cyber-bullying is not sufficient to intervene, parents may find themselves desperate to provide "evidence."

*"He does not believe it."* When a school official shows apprehension even after the who, what, where, is reported, a parent may become desperate to have the bullying taken seriously. Marcy's mom was interviewed in her midsize town's library planted within a subdivision of older homes. Marcy's mom, who brought her middle school and high school age daughters, began by showing me her daughter's cell phone with a text message from a bully that displayed, "Marcy, go F-off and get on weight watchers and go to Fit Zone...fat ass."

J.B.: Wow.

Marcy's mom: A lot of the kids would kick her, hit her, try to trip her, make her fall down, call her fat, tell her she stinks. Even though she showers every day, they tell her she stinks all the time...

J.B.: Before you reported to the school, what kind of thoughts or actions occurred for you as a parent?

Marcy's mom: Mad, upset. You know, seeing a child go through that, I can't be at the school to guide her through...So we did even put a tape recorder on her and the principal found the tape recorder on her and the principal called me and said, "Do you know your daughter has a tape recorder on her?" I said, 'Yes, I do.' I said, 'It is the only way we are going to have this thing resolved is by her carrying a tape recorder.' He said, "Well, kids might make fun of her because she has a tape recorder and they see her." I said, 'Well, they're doing it now so what does it matter if kids see her with a tape recorder?'

J.B.: What was the point of her carrying the tape recorder?

Marcy's mom: To get things on tape so I could prove to him [administrator] that this is going on...he doesn't believe that anything is happening, even though he has seen the text messages he knows that she is being called names, he does not believe it. They have all seen the phone, they've seen the messages, and he still does not believe it that it is happening.

In the previous interview, Chelsea's mom showed that providing specific examples of verbal bullying was not enough for school officials to take further action. Marcy's mom's felt "mad" and "upset" as school officials denied her daughter's bullying. This leads to an act of desperation: concealing a tape recorder on her daughter in hopes of providing necessary evidence "to prove" the bullying had happened and therefore, could be taken seriously. Compare this to the paradigm case of Jack's mom: "They [school officials] were very direct...it had been looked at and addressed." School officials not fully and systemically engaged in reports of bullying left all other parents having to rethink their next course of action.

*Legal threat as parental reaction.* Tom's parents spent two and a half years working directly with school officials, both in elementary and middle school, in hopes school officials would take the necessary actions to end the bullying. Here is an example of their desperation as parents who were looking for school officials to respond differently to their child's victimization:

Tom's dad: And here again, when we presented that documentation [Department of Education website do's and don'ts] to the school, they were offended that we were questioning them. I thought it was ironic, or maybe that's not a good word, but the irony that they were angry that we were questioning their [laughter]. When you look at the DOE website, these are expert people who have done research, and I was just at a loss...I forget what it looks like but it had like, "Do not put the bully and the victim face-to-face," and that kind of stuff. But was really funny was the fact that ah, I cannot tell the change that happened when we had contacted

the superintendent. We had even talked to them that we had contacted the ACLU, we had contacted—

Tom's mom: And no matter how offended they were with the documentation, things did change after we showed them, 'We understand now what our rights are and what your responsibilities are.' And, yeah, we mentioned it that Jon [husband] contacted the ACLU, and their [ACLU's] response was, "if the school doesn't start acting on your son's behalf—

Tom's dad: I forwarded it, c.c it to the school too. I'm not a big fan of the ACLU. In this way, I think it was interesting in giving them, just that threat. You know, and we told them—

Tom's mom: As parents, we were frustrated that we had to go to these measures. We had to go to these lengths, we had to threaten, we had to go to an actual official you know, getting legal things going, before they would actually deal with it in an appropriate manner.

Tom's parents illustrate school officials lack of reaction toward the bullies, despite the longstanding bullying that likely will result in long term psychological and social consequences for Tom and the bullies (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Nansel et al., 2001). What parents experience because of school officials not responding in any meaningful way can be further understood by the next paradigm case of Rachel's mom.

*"They Did Not Deal With It"*

Rachel's mom stands about 5 foot 4 inches, thin with long dark hair. She is currently raising her daughter while taking college courses. She found a brochure for this study on her small town library's bulletin board.

The interview was emotionally challenging for both Rachel's mom and me. Although the bullying had occurred several years ago, the trauma was still present for Rachel and her mother. Throughout the interview, as I would transition from one question to the next, Rachel's mom would become confused in thinking and reflecting on her understanding of what she was saying about the destructive nature of the imprint the bullying left on her and her daughter. Her expression would become dazed for several seconds after responding to a question. She would say, "Sorry, I was just thinking." During the interview, the tape recorder stopped several times as she wept and fought to regain her composure. I found myself often reluctant to ask follow up questions, fearing that I might be asking too much.

By the end of the interview, Rachel's mom was taken aback and apologetic for the several times she broke down and cried. Her re-experiencing the trauma she and her daughter experienced stirred emotions she previously thought were resolved (they were contained). Rachel's mom was the only participant who did not agree to a second interview. She communicated this with silence, by not returning three phone calls and a handwritten letter. Her demographic sheet was not sent back. Therefore, context in knowing additional background was obtained through the interview. This is her experience in attempting to keep her daughter from being bullied at school.

Rachel's mom: We were new to this small rural community back in 2005 and to tell you the whole story, it's kind of a personal situation. My daughter was sexually assaulted by a friend of the family that we've known for over 15 years. They lived here in this town, and my daughter had gone to this girl's house after school one day and was sexually



assaulted by this girl's step-father, and we had only lived here [in this community] for three days. One of the officers that, when we had gone to the hospital came to interview us; his daughter was in the same grade. So obviously, this other girl was in the same class as my daughter. Well, my daughter had missed two days of school and she had come back and apparently, maybe the police officer told his daughter, but it had been around school; it was in the newspapers, and obviously it didn't give her name, but being such a small town, she [daughter Rachel] was really picked on by a group of girls. They would call her a slut, whore, all kinds of horrible names.

J.B.: What grade was she in when this happened?

Rachel's mom: 8<sup>th</sup> grade...2005/2006, and it continued throughout the whole year. So the group of girls kept picking on my daughter and saying really inappropriate things to her. And I know one of the girls had said something to my daughter in the hallway, and my daughter said something back to her. I mean, she had just gotten to the point where she just couldn't take it anymore.

I contacted the principal. I had spoken with him on many occasions, and he didn't feel like it was appropriate to ever speak to these girls and tell them to stop or speak to their parents.

Again, as with Tom's mom and dad's experience, school officials were reluctant to confront the situation. Compare this to Jack's school officials' investigation and intervention that swiftly ended the bullying.

It continued to escalate until Rachel got so tired of it, this girl slammed her into the locker, she was 13, and this girl was almost 17, and slammed Rachel into the locker, scratched out one of her contacts, really physically assaulted her. Rachel got suspended from school and so did the other girl. I tried to go in and talk to the principal, because I know they do have policy set, but I just felt like it was ongoing for months and they didn't deal with it. I don't know if they didn't know how to deal with it, but at one point, I came to talk with the principal because they [bullies] had written some inappropriate language on the walls...Actually, Rachel had approached him first, and then I had come in to speak with him. I had to make him [principal] go in and clean off the wording in the bathroom because he knew for one week that was there on the walls and he let it go.

From a parent's perspective, the school official's letting it go gave the bully and supporting cast a free pass to continue, a phenomenon found by other parents in this study:

So it had gotten so bad that at the end of the year, 2006, Rachel and one of the girls got into a horrible fight. My daughter couldn't take it anymore. She's not a fighter. She is very intelligent, loving and outgoing girl and at that time became very depressed, horribly (gasp). She was seeing a psychologist, but being new in school, I mean, she still made the cheerleading team, she still played volleyball, but there was a different side of her at home. I mean she was withdrawn and angry. At school her grades--she went from, she is a grade ahead actually, very intelligent,

grades plummeted: D's and F's-- didn't care. I just felt like those girls that picked on her, most of them were quite a bit older, I don't know what their goal was or they didn't know Rachel, they didn't really know the situation. I think her being the new one, just you know ah (sigh) constantly and the principal really didn't--he just acted like it was no big deal. I think that because--this guy [who sexually assaulted Rachel] who has married this lady is quite a bit younger than her. I think he at one point was a student in this school district. I don't know if he was well liked or—

J.B.: The guy who did the sexual assault?

Rachel's mom: Um hum.

By school officials not dealing with her daughter's victimization, Rachel's mom sees the psychosocial effects the bullying has had on her daughter: withdrawal, anger, depression, plummeting grades, and apathy. In reflection, Rachel's mom reaches an important intersection of understanding. She initially wonders if the school official "didn't know how to deal with it" and therefore "let it go." As Rachel's mom talked more about the school official's responses, she wonders if the school official's allowance to let the bullying continue was due to Rachel's perpetrator being "well liked." Being new to a small, rural community affords few established social ties and that may have affected Rachel as a member. Lacking membership as a new family in the community put them at a disadvantage in leveraging the benefits of social capital.

*"We are not a good family?"* Rachel's mom, Anna's mom, and Sandra's mom experienced principals prone to favor those bullies and their families who were known

commodities in the school. This may be an issue of accumulated social capital from the bully and parents. The concept of a person or family having accumulated social capital pertains to the “web of cooperative relationships between citizens” in a community facilitated by having reciprocating trust in others (Brehm & Rahn, 1997, p. 999). These parents found being new to a school and community may have influenced the perceptions of how school officials perceived and responded to them. Tom’s dad, a middle school teacher himself, provides an exemplar of communication with his son’s principal.

‘Well, is our son a behavior problem?’ “Well no, Tom is good.”

‘Academically, does he have any problems’ “No, no, no! Actually he’s ahead of the other kids.” ‘Are we problems? We’re both educators, both supportive of public education.’ So we told them, ‘We don’t want to hear we are not good parents or we are not a good family’ because the implication was you know, what is your rubric to judge who is a good family and who is not? But, it turns out that a lot of these kids [bullies] had parents that volunteered, were involved in parent organizations, and so de-facto, these kids being promoted to student leaders, who they were being given a sense of entitlement, I think, to get away with some stuff because of who their parents were in the building. They had a high profile. These kids were given a kind of blind eye, my personal opinion, or, I think these kids are savvy enough that they knew how to work it.

Whether by entitlement, blind eye, accumulation of social capital or just being savvy, school officials, by not being fully engaged with the bully and their parents, allowed the bullying to continue. An interpretation these parents suggest is the idea of

bullies and their families having power to influence a school official's actions—or inactions. One study supports bullies being perceived as being “popular” by students and middle school staff (Bradshaw et al., 2007, p. 376). It is currently unknown how these social perceptions play out as entitlements or allowances to bullies and their family's influence of power.

*A Surprise for the Bully's Parent*

When school officials do not respond to repeated reports from a parent that their child is being bullied, a parent can go outside of the school to communicate the seriousness. Tom's mom and dad explained that after a long history of doing battle with their son's school officials, Tom returned home one day with torn clothes and shredded a back pack. They responded by calling the police.

Tom's dad: One guy [parent of the bully] that came to our house, as a parent he had no clue that this had been going on and that we had been (pause) that there had been a history.

J.B.: The parent that came to your house?

Tom's dad: He had been contacted because we contacted the Sheriff's department--

Tom's mom: And this person came. And my thing is I commend the parent: he came and there again, he's going with very limited knowledge ah, background, because the school did not let him know all the things that had happened already...

Tom's dad: And he brought an eyewitness with him.

Tom's mom: So he brought an eye witness that we thought was his son.

Turned out to be another kid on the bus—

Tom's dad: That was one of the bullies

Tom's mom: Who was this kid's friend and was a bully that was hitting Tom. So this guy came to our house, not even with his own son, but with another child to accuse us of whatever--

Tom's dad: Distorting the facts.

Tom's mom: Distorting the facts, not being truthful, Tom telling lies. By the time they left, that boy admitted and was apologizing and admitted his [own] and that man's son's involvement in the bus activities—

Tom's dad: But from that meeting, that parent was a responsible parent and we walked away with that, better. He [the parent] understood. There was responsibility.

Tom's mom: By the time it was done, he was embarrassed and ashamed.

The bully's parent being left out of ever knowing his son had a history of tormenting Tom was a result of school official's decision not to call all of the bully's parents. The communication loop by school officials led to a potential backlash. Even though there had been a longstanding history of bullying, the bully's parent was never informed. By school officials not informing the bully's parent, they allow further victimization and the potential backlash of the bully's parents for remaining uninformed.

*"They didn't even care."* For Rachel's mom, what mattered was having her daughter's school official respond by showing a level of care towards Rachel.

Rachel's mom: I, I felt like I could take what they were, you know--I was just upset about my daughter. I felt like they, the principal and administration, didn't even care. I mean, how can you not care about a child? A 13-year-old child.

J.B.: When you say "they?"

Rachel's mom. I just felt it was so hopeless, I didn't even know what to do. I mean, I tried speaking to them so many times. I expect my daughter to be safe at school. I do not feel comfortable with a 16, almost 17-year-old coming up and physically attacking my daughter. And they... they never spoke to the child, her parents--

J.B.: The school did not?

Rachel's mom: Never.

Despite her awareness of a "policy set" to deal with these situations, Rachel's mom's had expected "my daughter to be safe at school." However, this was violated repeatedly because of the school official's inaction. The social contract from school to parent that a safe, caring, educational environment be provided was repeatedly violated.

*"No big deal."* Rachel's mom's hopelessness seemed to come from school officials treating the reported bullying as "no big deal." This lack of concern was demonstrated to Rachel's mom in several instances. First, school officials did not want to speak to the girls or their parents who bullied about the problem. Second, despite clear evidence, school officials did not respond even to the writing on the wall, e.g., not washing the graffiti written about Rachel in the bathroom until demanded by Rachel's mom. Third, the repeated attempts by Rachel's mom to talk with the school officials led

to no action from the school official. These responses from the school official to avoid intervening while Rachel fell into depression, had plummeting grades, and had begun seeing a psychologist, fueled Rachel's mom's feelings of helplessness. The lack of protection from school officials left Rachel and her mother feeling exposed and vulnerable. The result for Rachel's mom was powerlessness as she watched her daughter fall apart. This occurred despite Rachel's mom having provided specific names of bullies, places where it was occurring, and evidence of her daughter's ongoing abuse.

The definition of bullying found in much of the scholarly literature has three legs on which it stands: 1) intentional harm-doing; 2) that is repeated; 3) and has a power imbalance (Olweus, 2003). Paradoxically, parents feel victimized when the bullying is allowed to continue. They, like their children, were found to respond internally and externally to school officials.

#### *Parents' Internal and External Responses in Reporting*

Parents had internal and external responses when they understood school officials' interventions were incomplete acts of providing protection. Although they were not being bullied, they were feeling the effects of its ongoing harassment onto their children.

*Parent's internalizing: "I Was Wasting My Time."* Parents shared their responses from the failure of school officials to engage in intervening effectively. These are a few examples of parents internalizing their efforts:

Rachel's mom....I just shut down. I didn't (pause) after a while I shut down; it wasn't getting any better. I just felt like I was wasting my time.



Chelsea's mom: While both my husband and I were angry, we are not retaliating kind of people. We were sad and we were angry.

Sadie's mom: To be honest with you, Sadie and I sat and cried a lot. I am very into my kids' lives. When it hurt her that bad it really affected me because her and I are close, and that's where she runs to if she's being hurt or being threatened being bullied, it's mom. Her dad is not in her life so...

J.B.: What was this experience and all that happened after it like for you?

Sandra's mom: Oh, it was hell (hands tremble in holding a sheet of paper).  
It was a living hell.

*Parent's Externalizing: "Bring it on!"* Sandra's mom's response to repeated attempts to have school officials take action to stop the bullying enters a breaking point in the principal's office:

Sandra's mom: I told Mr. Vice Principal, 'I can see why kids take guns to school cause you guys can't do a damn thing.' He goes, "we are doing the best we can, but our hands are tied." [hand smacks the table] "Then get off of them! Why are your hands tied? I don't understand this! My daughter is the victim. Bring it on! You have the attorney for the school corporation. I think he has more pull than the [bully's] parents can find. They're split up. Maybe they have good divorce lawyers but I'm sure they're not going to go up against a school corporation's attorney.' I don't know why the school was so afraid. I know the corporation attorney, he had my son in basketball. He's a good guy. He knows the rules. I don't

think he will back down from these weasels. I think it's the teachers and the principals; I don't understand why?

J.B.: So there's a lack of understanding why the school can't enforce their own rules?

Sandra's mom: Yes, exactly. And reading that book [school discipline policy] to her [bully] twice: once first semester, once second semester, obviously, like I told um, did not sink in. And why should it? What punishment is she going to get?

Sandra's mom shared a moment of candidness with her daughter's school official. She received the message from the school official, "our hands are tied." In that moment, she responded by not asking, but telling, the school official to "get off them." The school official's inaction of not further engaging the situation brought her closer to understanding what brings students to perpetrate acts of violence against other students and school officials. Chelsea's mom, who herself was in the process of earning a master's degree in school counseling, states her thoughts on her daughter's school official's responses:

Oh, I would just say that they're words only: there weren't any actions. I was in the school a lot and I would walk down the halls and felt like I should just tear those [anti-bullying] posters down.

As Benbenishty and Astor (2005) suggest, the study of parents' reactions to their youth being involved in school violence should be added to our understanding how parents' reactions influence school violence directly. Although no parent in this study

perpetrated violence against the bullies or school officials, parents were often brought to points of intense frustration aimed at school officials.

The attempt to use parenting skills by bringing in experts to address the bullying episodes failed for all but one parent in this study. Once again, this left parents in a state of present-to-hand, having to rethink their next action in responding to their child's school bullying problem. The next section will examine parents' fallout from what occurred. It underscores parents' experiences in having to rethink ways of protecting their child when school officials were unable to do so.

### Stage Three: Aftermath

*In the aftermath of a severe storm, the reports of damage within individual households are made. While key parts of the storm's violence are told, reflections of the damage and the situation emerge. As in the tales of Katrina, key turning points are recounted. Parents uncover the damage and face truths: whether to stay in the ravaged, unprotected environment within an obvious storm path or leave for the hope of a new beginning.*

Nine out of the ten parent sets in this study were shown by school officials, whether by word or deed, that no other support or action would be provided for their child who was a continued target of bullying. Their actions left parents understanding that school officials were unable to restore parents' ready-to-hand and consequently, the problem remained on the parent to fix as parenting remained broken.

#### *Broken and Abandoned*

Anna's mom: ...Okay, so we knew that the school knew. It was reported, but there was nothing, there was no effective means. I mean, nothing ever

was accomplished, other than kind of telling. And you know, I guess from, I guess the analogy would be that somebody sees someone throwing a rock, and so you call the police and say, “Hey, somebody is throwing a rock,” but the police never show up. So the person is still there throwing the rock. So you’ve done what you’re supposed to do, but no one else has followed up.

J.B.: Interesting--that analogy.

Anna’s mom: Well then, if you take the analogy further, what happens?

Eventually something is getting broken (discomforted laugh).

Anna’s mom tells of doing what she was supposed to do in pursuing safety by reporting, but the rocks being thrown at Anna kept coming--to the point of Anna’s mom seeing her daughter breaking. Parents were left to bear the full responsibility to provide protection for their bullied child, even while at school. Parents in this study considered and often found ways of having to provide protection.

*“Stuck In Hell”*

Sandra’s mom: It was a living hell for her. She's been sick. She has been seen at [big] hospital. It's been horrible. It's hell [mother begins to cry].

She wants to be homeschooled and I can't do it... I've asked for help at the school, had asked help from the counselors and it's like, they can only do so much...

Smith and colleagues (2004) found psycho-somatic complaints like Sandra’s are found to be one of the many outcomes for victims of bullying. They also found absenteeism, loss of friends, depression, and anxiety as outcomes for victims.

Sandra's mom: My child has been in and out of the hospital, and some of the events that they [bullies] had been accusing her of she couldn't have done because she was in the hospital or hugging the toilet or in the emergency room.

J.B.: Were these hospitalizations anything to do with the bullying?

Sandra's mom: Nerves. Now she has been on medication trying to figure out what was wrong. Now we've decided that, while we figured out through doctors, which I have the records right here [in a file folder], her medical bills and medical diagnoses they can't find anything wrong except to refer back to the school. The stress that the school has caused...Now she doesn't even want to go to school. She prays for snow days. She prays for the bus to break down, anything to keep out of school. She prays for two-hour delays. She can't wait for this year to get over. She loves to learn but it's hell at school and it's affecting her in every way.

Sandra's mom explains that "The stress that the school has caused" when bullying is allowed to continue made school an aversion for Sandra. Her praying for some mishap or natural disaster to buy her time away from school is expressed as a result of her daughter's victimization.

### *Evacuating the Premises*

Many participants in this study revealed that although they went to great efforts to report multiple times to school officials, their child was no longer able to function in their middle school. Six parents had set into motion plans to remove their child either from the

school or the environment e.g., the bus in which the bullying took place. At the time of the study, five parent sets had followed through.

Tom's dad: We had to get a signature from Tom's superintendent, releasing him because of that money that is tied to Tom, \$5,280 or whatever it is. Saying, I release that money to go [with Tom] to Y school corporation we said. If he did not sign that, we would have gone through a legal process.

Tom's mom: When we met with Y Township to ask if they would accept Tom for a transfer, they gave us the paper work and they said "We would be glad to have him but good luck." Tom's school [the township in where the family lives] has never signed one of these forms before and they said they will never sign one. But we think because of the 2.5 year history with Tom's situation that they didn't balk at all.

Tom's dad: I think they were happy to see us go.

Tom's mom: We got the signature within a week. The school district he transferred to could not believe—

Tom's parents' case was not a stand alone. During the course of recruiting parents for this study, I received a phone call from a parent who wanted to be interviewed. Four female peers were bullying her daughter, an honor student at a Christian middle school. The mother shared that she was beside herself when the principal finally suggested it would be more feasible for the parent to keep her daughter home for the last six weeks of school, allowing her time to find a different school to attend for the fall. The mother felt,

as recorded in field notes, that it was easier for the principal to get rid of her daughter than it would be to deal with the situation of getting the bullies to stop.

*Temporary Leave of Absence*

When Rachel's mom found that her daughter's school officials would not intervene, she looked at other options:

Rachel's mom: So I did take my daughter out of school for a while. I mean I took her to another school.

J.B.: How did that work for your daughter?

Rachel's mom: Well, she seemed to really flourish and do better. It's (slight sigh) really hard to describe because Rachel is popular in school, she is back in our town's school now. I mean she is popular at school and has a lot of friends, but it was just those group of girls—

J.B.: Those older girls?

Rachel's mom: Yeah, these older girls who didn't know Rachel and you know, the school wasn't supportive.

Rachel's mom's concern that her daughter needed time to heal in a new school where she was not bullied did result in providing Rachel protection. Other parents took similar measures in pulling their child out of a school, they considered unsafe.

*Home School Bound*

For Anna's mom, pulling a child from her middle school was not easy. Anna's mom was strongly involved in working with youth in 4-H and other activities so the decision came for her to provide a home-school for Anna came with some hesitation:

Anna still to this day, now I pulled her out of school in December this past year and we are still what they call decompressing and hearing stories because a lot of stories she is not going to tell me...you know my husband and I had been going back and forth and he was a really big advocate for home school, I was not, I was like 'no, I have too many things to do' type attitude. I hope that doesn't sound terrible, but well, I kind of felt like she had a better shot, staying in school and going through whatever so.

Although Anna's mom acknowledges that trained teachers are better equipped to educate her child, the alternatives were few for her as a rural parent. The bullying situation, which school officials let continue, led Anna's mom to pull Anna from school midyear.

What Anna's mom found interesting was the response after pulling her child:

When I pulled Anna to homeschooling there is a guy who lives down the street from me who is a teacher, he never once asked how Anna is doing. On our home school blog somebody put that through and I said it is so interesting that not one person--not one person has asked me how my daughter's doing.

#### *Avoiding the School Bus*

Maureen's mom: ...And so she begged my husband and I to not make her take the bus and to pick her up every day from school or to do what we could. And so we, we made arrangements. I actually was taking her to school in the morning anyway because the time I had to be at work and the time she had to be at school worked out perfectly. It was just as easy for me to drop her off at school. We lived a mile and a half from school and



she would have a half an hour bus ride from it so you know, it was just easier. But my husband, who is disabled and does not drive a lot, made a commitment to pick her up every day after school. So once in a while she would get stuck having to ride the bus, but we just kinda went ahead and worked it out in our schedule; she was really appreciative about that. So that is sort of how we dealt with it.

*Repercussions of Being Trapped*

Although some students were pulled from school, some parents did not have the financial resources to provide that kind of protection. In doing so, bullied children are left vulnerable:

Sandra's mom: Oh, the repercussions were horrible once she found out because when the girls find out because they get called to the office and they find out and then they make it harder than hell for her at school. "Well, you always have to run to your mother and tell." Well, where else can she go tell? She tells the teacher; the teacher tells the principal the mom has to come in; that's what parents are for, that's what the teachers are for, yeah, she's going to tell. But they make it a living hell and now she's afraid to do anything.

Due to their inability to afford the Christian school 25 miles from their rural home, Sandra and her parent stayed in the situation as the bullying continued. Parents express that the aftermath of the ordeal leaves them with emotional fallout.

*"We Felt Helpless"*

J.B.: How did Tom adjust to you reporting to the middle school?

Tom's dad: He was conflicted. He was afraid he was only going to escalate the problem and most times it did—

Tom's mom and dad: It did [in unison]

Tom's dad: It did not solve the problem, because these kids are unrelenting. They would take this attitude that *they* had been wronged.

Tom's mom: He was also very angry at us because we told him that things would be different. We promised him things would get better.

Tom's dad: And we didn't realize how angry he was until just recently about that.

Tom's mom: And it wasn't better. And honestly, we don't know where his strength of character and moral fiber comes from because I don't know of a child who wouldn't have gone nuts by now—

Within the interviews, four parents, without being asked, shared that their children had received or still were receiving counseling as a result of being bullied. In addition, another parent was making trips to the hospital for the child's "nerves."

J.B.: Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your experience?

Tom's mom: By the time it was over, we felt like we were victimized as well. We felt helpless.

Tom's dad: Depending on the level of how often it is going on, I would highly recommend counseling. I mean, it may not be--cause here again, kids internalize a lot. I think the way they process it, they feel that they're

at fault and we... one of the biggest regrets we have is that we waited too long to have counseling going on for Tom because we want him to—  
 Tom's mom: There is going to be a lot of, for the victim, there is going to be a lot of anger built up. Disillusionment with the system, disillusionment with the parents, the lack of feelings that parents can protect them or care for them properly...

*Indiana's Anti-Bullying Law: "I Didn't Know There Was One."*

Perhaps the biggest surprise in the interviewing of parents in this study was learning that nine out of ten did not rely on the state anti-bullying law in any way. Most parents were unaware there was such a law in place. Tom's parents were the only parents who did use the law, thanks to his discovering it in an educator's law class.

J.B.: ...How did Indiana's anti-bullying law play a part for you as parents?

Tom's dad: The only thing we could use them as is as a threat.

Tom's mom: Until we showed them the law, the print of the law—

Tom's dad: I think they were aware of the liability they had.

Tom's mom: They did not act on our concern until we pointed out to them we were aware of the law and had the law in hand and quoted the law.

J.B.: What is your understanding of the liability of the Indiana Law?

Tom's dad: I think they realized they did not have a policy in place, that they were not dealing with it with the way they were mandated or I would say that would put them in, what's the legal phrase?

Tom's mom: Good faith?

Tom's dad: Good faith...Because under In Loco Parentis, they were negligent. We are placing our children in their care in their custody, and my son's being hit, being ostracized, and being victimized in every conceivable way, and this is going on for how long? They had been aware of it by email and whatever else. And there again I find it interesting the only people who were consistently good about dealing with it was the transportation department. This is not a licensed or educated individual—just a classified employee whom I think is embarrassing to me as an educator.

Despite the use of the law, Tom's parents experienced their son's continued victimization until the middle of sixth grade, when he was transferred to a different school. The rest of the parents did not rely on the law, mostly due to being uninformed about it:

J.B.: At any time, whether it was a school official or teacher did anyone talk about or mention anti-bullying laws or policies?

Jack's mom: When it happened, yes. That we don't tolerate that type of thing. I know they mentioned then.

To clarify, I contacted Jack's mom by email. She responded by stating, "I think it was more as a 'we don't tolerate'....not state policy." In any case, the words of her son's principal were backed by the actions he took to put an end to the bullying situation. For other parents, the experience of loss of protection and the state anti-bullying law is expressed.

J. B.: Throughout the time of your child being bullied, how did Indiana's anti-bullying laws play a part for you as parent?

Chelsea's mom: I don't even know what the law states. No one ever told me, so I would say none (laughter). I had never seen it written out. Even if they would give you a written account of what the law is or to send you to a site or just some information... I did all the research on my own. I did quite a bit of research on bullying to see if, as parents, we were doing the right things, but no one ever gave us any kind of resources to look into. In fact, I had found a curriculum used mostly for homeschoolers, but anyone could use it from a bullying standpoint. I had taken that information into the counselor and told her about it, but she never had any information to give us at all.

Chelsea's mom reported her husband as a lawyer on the demographic sheet for the study. This law, although not invisible, is not apparent to most parents seeking help from their child being bullied.

Sandra's mom: Obviously, it didn't play one. The realtor that I have been talking to has been trying to get a hold of a person to get a hold of that law because for some reason we can't get it off the Internet. It doesn't print off.

Elizabeth's mom: I do not think it really applied (laughter).

Marcy's mom: No. Nothing was given to me or, you mean by the school telling me to... no. I guess I just really go by my thoughts on it.

Rachael's mom: I didn't even know that we had one. Other than the small talk that they have, I wasn't even aware.

Sadie's mom: I guess I didn't know there was one.

Anna's mom: I don't even know what their anti-bullying laws are.

Maureen's mom, although not aware of the specific law, took the concern of school bullying to try and leverage school officials' intervention:

J.B.: How did Indiana's anti-bullying laws play a part in your ability to intervene?

Maureen's mom: Well, I'm aware that people have taken a much harder stand against bullying and the school is obligated now to intervene. So I am a little surprised that nothing happened because I thought it would be a sort of magic word (voice gets louder) if I used the B-word--if I use the B-word and didn't just say, 'She is having a hard time on the bus and there are some mean...I used the bullying word in particular, consciously, I remember saying, "Bullying" because I thought she would be like, "Oh my gosh, we better do something about this." And like I said, she did do all the appropriate things: whipped out her notepad and took down all the information but then nothing...the loop never got closed with them telling us. We never took her back so for the rest of the school year she didn't have to go.

Parents reported never hearing about the state anti-bullying law from school officials, or anyone else. Further, parents reported not being given any resources in dealing with their child's victimization.

*Parents' Parting Thoughts*

J.B.: Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your experience of what it's like being a parent as your child is being bullied in reporting to a school official?

Chelsea's mom: Both of us as parents are just terribly disappointed in the response that we received. We are very saddened by the effect it has had on our daughter. She has had counseling. Of course, we are very angry at this particular student (bully). Now she's [daughter] starting to give back what she's been given. That's just really sad that has to take place and continue even. This is the fourth year. I feel like maybe if it could have been nipped it in the bud early on in the beginning of seventh grade with this particular student, it wouldn't have continued... I don't know, maybe she would have, I don't know. I know her home situation is quite bad so maybe it's something that wouldn't have changed.

J.B.: How do you interpret how the school responded?

Chelsea's mom: I would just say that their response was very weak. I don't think they took our complaint seriously. And I wish we would have been given some resources, that would've been helpful. In the computer age you have a lot at your fingertips anyways but...

But school officials not taking parents' bullying complaints seriously and responding ineffectively is a concern. Elizabeth points this problem out to her mother:

Elizabeth's mom: Ohhh, I thought she was very (pause) she [school counselor] didn't show any strength, that's for sure. She was a coward

that's backing out of what she should be addressing. Like I say, the whole situation on how she handled it was just ...she didn't take it seriously.

When they [school officials] drill it into these kids that they can't bully and...even a couple of nights ago, my daughter got out her [student] handbook because it still really bothers her the way it was handled. We talked about this Monday night. She said, "Mom, read this" you know, "read how they are supposed to discipline people that are bullying. None of that happened!" These girls' parents weren't called; they didn't get detention. Nothing was followed by the way it was written in the handbook. It was just sort of, a slap on the hand.

Not having shown strength by not following up on treating the bullying as a serious situation left Elizabeth's mom feeling frustrated. Here lies the problem: What is said, what is shown (symbolized), and what occurs, may be very different. Elizabeth's mom had sent me a photocopy of the page in the student handbook her daughter was reading aloud to her. Here is the section on bullying:

**Bullying**—Negative, repeated and persistent actions, which tend to intimidate, oppress, inflict injury distress or discomfort upon another individual.



Table 6: Consequences for Bullying From a Middle School Student Handbook

Bullying	First Offense:	Second Offense:	Third Offense:
	Notify Parents	Notify Parents	Parent Conference
	0-2 days	1-3 days of Out of	3-10 days
	In School	School	Out of School Suspension
	Suspension	Suspension	Discipline Conference
	Counseling	Counseling	Contract

The “slap on the hand,” as Elizabeth’s mom describes it, was not a meaningful sanction or message for the bullies to stop. The response was clearly not protecting the victim from the relational and cyber bullying that occurred and was brought to the attention of the school counselor. Elizabeth and her mom saw what was supposed to have occurred, what actually occurred, and the gap between the two.

*Justice will prevail: not true.*

J.B.: How has your reporting to Tom’s middle school affected your relationship with Tom?

Tom’s mom: You know justice will prevail. You tell your kids ‘if you just do the right thing and you are a good kid everything will work out.’ And unfortunately, that is not true. And I think he was very angry at us for a while, he even expressed that he was angry that we told him that things would get better and they never did. You know (pause).

Tom's dad: That we told him things would be better when he went to the middle school and it turns out that they weren't. It turns out that things were even worse than before. He was angry because he felt we lied to him and deceived him... I think they [school officials] needed to handle it aggressively right from the onset.

Parents whose children are being bullied see the consequences of bullying when it is left unchecked by school officials. The next section *Implications*, will discuss recommendations to address the gap between parents' concerned action of reporting and school officials' willingness to intervene.

## CHAPTER VI

### IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to understand the experiences of Indiana parents in reporting their middle school children being bullied to school officials. The reporting took place in the context of a state anti-bullying law that was in place since 2005. Parents described their experiences in three stages: discovery, reporting, and aftermath. Their experiences serve as recommendations to school officials, social workers, policymakers, and other parents interested in responding to school bullying. Findings and implications are compared with existing research on bullying.

#### *Limitations*

Several limitations are recognized with this study. The study's interpretive phenomenological approach does not aid in the prediction of where or when students are likely to experience school bullying, but does offer readers an understanding of the issues parents face in reporting bullying to school officials. Although this study's approach is not a generalizable, the results do provide depth over breadth and may be transferable to readers' experiences. Regarding the sample, this study lacked racial diversity. Except for one father, the sample was mothers who reported their children's victimization. In addition, the study focused on Indiana parents who reported their child's bullying victimization under the state's specific anti-bullying law. Other states without anti-bullying laws or laws with other mandates (e.g., school anti-harassment laws) may alter the experiences of parents' reporting. This study also excluded parents whose bullied child received special education services. This decision was due to the closer monitoring

by school officials of these students. Lastly, this study focused on parent perceptions exclusively and therefore, lacked the perceptions of administrators, teachers, or students.

*Summary of Three Stages*

*Discovery.* Initially, there was “a tough pill to swallow” for parents accepting that their child was being bullied. Before reporting bullying to a school official, all but one parent responded to their child’s being bullied by giving advice. Parents experienced this as being ineffective in dealing with the bullying. When parents monitored their children and found psycho-social behaviors that seemed to stem from the bullying (e.g., not wanting to go to school, kicking the cat, or crying when getting off the school bus), they had to rethink how to protect their child from the targeted harm at school.

*Reporting.* Reporting to school officials became the next stage for parents in seeking a stop to their children’s victimization. Parents experienced a variety of responses from school officials that were inadequate in resolving the bullying problem including:

- the principal direct the parent the teacher during class-time to provide intervention,
- being told bullying could not be proven (i.e., no physical evidence),
- being told by school administrators they are unable to intervene further (e.g., “our hands are tied”),
- being told the bully was from a “good family” and therefore they did not need to involve the bullies’ parents,
- the bully, from the victims’ parents’ perspective, being given a “blind-eye” and,
- responding to bullying as if “it was no big deal” or “Girls will be girls.”

*Aftermath.* Nine of ten responses to reported bullying were inadequate and resulted in parents having internal responses themselves. As Rachel's mom stated, "I just shut down...I felt like I was wasting my time." Other parents cried in silence, not believing there was hope in fixing their child's pain. Another expressed outrage e.g., "I can see why kids take guns to school 'cause you guys can't do a damn thing!" As Anna's mom expressed, "You've done what you are supposed to do [as a parent], but no one else has followed up."

Several parents reflected how school officials seemed unprepared to follow their student discipline handbook regarding bullying. Chelsea's mom, for example, assessed the lost opportunities from school officials early on and stated, "I feel like if they would have nipped it in the bud early-on, in the beginning of seventh grade with this particular student, it wouldn't have continued." Nevertheless, the bullying did continue for all but one family in this study. Feelings of "helplessness," "anger," "guilt," "disappointment," and "frustration" were experienced by several parents when school officials failed to resolve the bullying.

Nine of the parents experienced rethinking how to provide protection for their child when school officials failed to intervene. Parents' responses included homeschooling, transferring their child to another school district, or removing them from the specific bullying environment (e.g., school bus) by transporting their child to and from school. Other parents were not as fortunate in their options to provide their child protection from school bullies. As Sandra's mom states, "It's hell [mother begins to cry]. She wants to be homeschooled and I can't do it..."

## Implications and Recommendations for School Officials

### *A Clear Reporting Process for Parents*

The confusion for parents regarding reporting procedures (i.e., to whom to report to and how) is important to address. Parents reporting bullying to school officials need a clear process to follow. In reviewing each state's anti-bullying law, I found Arizona, Connecticut, Maryland, Utah, and Vermont were mandated to provide pre-made forms for parents and students to report school bullying. Every school can provide a premade form, made available on the school's website, in the handbook, and in the front office of any school. The form can document the necessary data (who, what, where, when, and how often) to guide school officials in following through on the investigation. On a macro level, these carbon-copied forms should be sent to a state's Department of Education to track instances, types, and interventions of all school bullying incidents.

Parents in this study were often uncertain about to whom they should report the bullying: a counselor, teacher, student service representative, school secretary, or principal. Even after multiple reports, parents who reported bullying to counselors or student service representatives were unsure if the principal was ever informed about the bullying. One parent found that after repeatedly reporting bullying incidents to the middle school's student service representative, her daughter's vice-principal was unaware of the long-standing bullying that was occurring.

Therefore, parents need to know up front who is specifically designated and responsible for the investigation and intervention of school bullying incidents. Because bullying is a intentional act of harm-doing that is repeated, it requires swift *disciplinary* action. The principal or vice principal, who normally are charged with the role of

disciplinarian, must be willing to facilitate the process. There should be a statement in all school handbooks and electronically on school websites such as, “If a parent suspects any form of school violence, including bullying, a parent is to fill out this form and turn it into the [principal]...for investigation.” This can be useful for parents to engage the right school official (disciplinarian) with the details. Principals who intervene early in the process with the bully and their parent may spare the victim (and their parents) continued harm. The principal can also coordinate support staff in providing services, e.g., mental health screening and therapeutic intervention for the bully, by a school social worker or other qualified school professional.

#### *What School Officials Must Consider*

This study demonstrates that parents who brought the necessary information of the “who, what, where, and when” of their child’s bullying situation to school officials rarely experienced a successful intervention, even when the bullying turned into sexual harassment. Often, the victim was penalized, e.g., moving the victim, not the bully, to a different locker location in the school. Like Jack’s mom experienced in this study, school officials must put the necessary information into actions.

Much of the bullying was verbal in content and therefore did not provide school officials with “physical evidence.” The school official’s belief expressed as “well, she’s not being hit—she’s not being hurt” must be reexamined, especially in light of evidence from Dinkes and colleagues’ (2006) study of U.S. secondary schools. The study revealed that verbal bullying is the most common form of bullying for both male and females, regardless of race, urban v. rural, or public v. private schools. School officials need to take acts of verbal bullying seriously and view them as emotional abuse. When verbal

bullying is allowed to continue at school, verbally attacking a victim's physical, social, or ethnic features can escalate to physical aggression (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Geiger & Fischer, 2006). As one parent in this study reminds us, the physical wounds of bullying can heal, but the mental wounds remain. Parents in this study reported school officials often allowed the bullies to attend class with their victimized child after no apparent sanction or parental notification to the bully's parents. As a result, the bullying continued, and even escalated. Therefore, school officials must be diligent, holding the bully accountable until the bullying is resolved.

*School officials must notify the bullies' parents.* One underlying concern shared by parents who did not experience a successful intervention was that school officials did not contact the bullies' parents. As Rachel's mom experienced, "I contacted the principal. I had spoken to him on many occasions and he didn't feel it was appropriate to ever speak to these girls and tell them to stop or to speak to their parents." School officials must be willing to engage the parents of the offending students. If not, the victim's parents may find ways to compensate for the inaction e.g., involving the police. As seen through Tom's mom and dad, it can be shocking, even bewildering, for the bully's parents when they learn sometimes years later of the history of their child's behavior.

Olweus (1992), who developed the most widely used whole-school anti-bullying program, has admitted to the difficulty in engaging children's parents, whether of the bullies or the victims. Even when bullying is presented as a discussion topic at parent night for schools, turnouts have been "disappointing" (Pepler & Craig, 1994, p. 104). School officials must consider ways that hold the bully accountable while maintaining



close parental collaboration (Stevens et al., 2001). Perhaps one way to seek engagement is for the bullying student to remain expelled until the parent and youth meet with the disciplinarian.

*School officials must maintain contact with victims' parents.* After reporting, parents often spoke of a communication “loop” that never closed. The theme of no callback or email from school officials occurred despite being told “we’ll let you know what we find.” If school officials want to communicate to parents that the reported bullying is being taken seriously, they need to go beyond just an intake of parent information. Based on the experience of parents in this study, school officials must think about providing parents information about: 1) what will be done to protect their child from harm, 2) in what time period and 3) and how school officials will contact the parent when the intervention has been provided. This protocol can guide school officials’ efforts in providing necessary information to parents without disclosing the names of the perpetrators.

*School officials must enforce the rules.* Another concern experienced by the majority of the parents in this study was how the school officials failed to follow their own student handbook in dealing with bullying. Official’s unwillingness to act can lead to parents perceiving the bullies as being given a “free pass” to continue damaging their child’s well-being. This response by a school official may send the message to a parent that they are “a coward that’s backing out of what she should be addressing,” as Elizabeth’s mom stated. School officials must be willing to go beyond symbolism in the handbook and respond using actions as outlined within the handbooks.

When school officials fail to take reports of bullying by parents as a serious threat to students' well-being, the parent, their child, and the school officials may all lose. The school officials lose vital community support as Rachel's mom illustrates, "I don't think I have any trust of any kind for principals...I don't feel like enough is done. I feel that bullies are just allowed to continue to act that way." A disappointed parent degrading school officials' actions with other parents can diminish community support and create adversarial relationships toward school officials (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005). Therefore, school officials must make certain that their response to a child being bullied is a complete response that allows victims' parents to provide feedback to school officials.

By not enforcing the rules, school officials allow bullying to progress. Olweus (2003) calls attention to the allowance of bullying by adults as an "environmental factor. Attitudes, behavior, and routines of relevant adults—in particular teachers and principals—play a crucial role in determining the extent to which bullying problems will manifest themselves in larger units, such as a classroom or school" (p. 14). Michal Dorn (2006), author of *Weakfish*, writes about the influence a principal and other school officials can have on the environment. Describing his own experiences, moving from school to school, and ending up at a school where he was in the white minority, he initially feared the school bullying would be worse than he had experienced in the higher socioeconomic status schools. However, his experience was surprisingly different:

As time passed...it finally struck Stephen that the principal was the cause of his new lease on life. The principal, it seemed, was subject to appear at any moment, at any place in the school. The principal would pop up in classrooms, in the library, in the cafeteria, or on the playground. Stephen also realized that there always seemed to be an adult within earshot or eyesight. At any other given moment, a teacher, custodian, librarian, or

other “big person” was close at hand...Whenever a student acted in an untoward fashion, made an inappropriate comment about another child or acted in some other inappropriate manner, an adult would quickly intervene and correct the situation. (p. 45)

Tom’s mom and dad had a similar experience. Tom’s mom explains, “He and us have gone from losing faith in the system [public education] to actually realizing it may not be the system, it may be the system in the *one school* that--it doesn’t have to be that way.” Tom finally experienced what it meant to be safe in school again. Thus, each school’s response to bullying may be different; therefore, every school needs to pursue best practices in response to bullying.

*School Officials Must Not Treat the Victim as the Problem*

When school officials view the bullying as the victim’s problem and an inconvenience to which they must attend, in effect, an allowance has been made for the bully or bullies. As Tom’s mom described, “The more we tried to get the school to address it, the more adult staff seemed to consider Tom a problem or trouble.” School officials must be willing to fully engage in communicating by word and by action that bullying of any kind--verbal, physical, relational, or cyber--will not be permitted and specific procedures will be used when bullying is reported.

*School officials must not let the principal defer the bullying problem to the teacher.*

Principals who refer the parent to the teacher to resolve the bullying without thoroughly assessing the bullying situation can put the parent, like Sadie’s mom, in a “no-win situation because (pause) *that was just going to make the kids [bullies] mad.* They looked at her as ‘mommy came in...’ Therefore, when bullying is reported, a principal who is charged with discipline must first assess the pervasiveness of bullying for the victim. Bullying is often an ecological problem that occurs in more than one place

(Espelage & Swearer, 2003). A principal making a teacher proceed with the intervention may be doing more harm than good.

### *Implications and Recommendations for Parents*

#### *Parents Must Know How to Advocate in Schools*

Nine parents who reported bullying to school officials did not experience protection but instead, the continuation of bullying therefore, were left rethinking what to do next. Parents need to know a process or steps to take if a principal fails to protect their child (see Appendix J). To begin the process, parents must first identify the school official charged with disciplinary action regarding bullying. This person is most often the principal or vice principal. Schools and school systems have a hierarchy from the principal, to the superintendent, to the district school board, to the city school board (where applicable), to the State Department of Education, to the U.S. Department of Education. Finally, when blatant violations of protection continue, parents can access media sources (e.g., local paper or TV station) to bring attention to their concerns.

When responses to bullying from a principal or vice principal continue to be inadequate in providing protection, Tom's dad suggests, "If no satisfaction from that happens, I would follow with the next step; I would go straight to a superintendent." An example of how a superintendent can provide leadership came from my pilot study interview of a single Michigan mom who was a university professor. After three unsuccessful meetings with the middle school principals, counselor, and a school liaison officer, the same group of female bullies in her daughter's first year of high school began to cyber bully her on Facebook. The mother demanded that the superintendent attend a parent meeting. The parent made it clear that she needed the yearlong bullying problem

taken care of and would not allow her daughter to be re-victimized by signing a “no contact contract” (i.e., a contract that states the victim and bully agree not to make visual, physical or written contact with one another). The superintendent, after hearing the Michigan mom’s saga of several poorly executed efforts from school officials in her daughter’s middle school, simply said to the counselors, “Call the [bully’s] parents and tell them to come in for a meeting.” The Michigan mom reported, “The counselors jumped up and left the room, and we didn’t have any problems from those bullies again.” However, taking this step of involving the superintendent does not guarantee a successful intervention.

If the superintendent fails to intervene by calling the bully’s parents and following the student handbook, a parent can take the next step by acknowledging this problem at a local school board meeting. Parents are advised to contact the school district office ahead of time to be put on the school board agenda. If a parent is unable to meet the scheduling deadline for the agenda, school boards accept *comments from the public* (see Appendix J). This is a time when any public member may share thoughts and concerns that are school-related at the meeting (Gallagher et al., 2005).

If results from this request allow for the continuation of victimization from the bullies, the next step would be contacting the State Department of Education for assistance. In that letter or meeting, parents should outline the interventions they have gone through, whom they spoke to, and that they need their child to be safe in school. If this does not leverage safety, local newspapers and television news may be interested in the story. Alternatively, as Tom’s mom and dad demonstrated, calling local police and

filing assault charges related to the physical bullying suggests to the bullies that the victim and parents are serious about taking legal actions.

*Advice for Parents, By Parents: Be Aggressive*

One piece of advice parents would tell another parent who is facing the same situation is to “be aggressive.” Tom’s mom, an elementary librarian, stated in reflecting on school officials’ incomplete response during a two-and a half year period, “We as parents have a lot of guilt. We definitely think we should have been more pushy and aggressive right from the beginning.” Parents must let school officials know of the continued harm that is being afflicted upon their child at school and that through the federal law of *in loco parentis* (Latin for “in place of the parent”), school officials are entrusted to provide protection for all students while they are at school.

*Lessons from a Positive Intervention*

Several steps are part of a positive intervention that one parent reported in this study. This paradigm case illustrates how her son’s school official resolved the breakdown. The day to day parenting practices were restored (what Heidegger refers to as the *Ready-to-Hand*) within a 24-hour period of parental reporting. The school official, a Catholic school principal with 30 years of public school experience, responded in a uniquely different way to a report of a student being bullied. This principal’s response provides school officials a concrete example of a complete, engaged, professional response from a school official.

*A school official’s complete response.* In this sample, only one parent encountered a positive response by a school official. This paradigm case provided a complete response for parents as reported by Jack’s mom. And a face-to-face interview

with Jack's principal produced what he called "a straightforward approach." This approach includes the following steps or procedures:

1. Upon first report, the principal investigates, first the victim, then the alleged bullies separately.
2. When evidence is found, the principal calls the victim's parents to alert and inform them about what procedures will be taken.
3. The principal calls the bullies and informs them that they are responsible for victimizing a school community member and that it is unacceptable.
4. The principal has every bully involved listen to the victim in order to know how it feels to be bullied by them.
5. Students who bullied respond to the victim in the principal's presence.
6. The principal calls each bully's parent and states, "Billy's here in my office this afternoon; we've had an incident and I need your support." The principal then hands the phone to the child who bullied to explain his or her behavior to the parent.
7. The principal asks each child involved to write a letter of apology to the victim's parent, apologizing for what he or she has done to his or her child and why it will not happen again.
8. The principal communicates to all of the victim's teachers to alert them of the situation.
9. The principal phones the victim's parents and explains how the situation was resolved.

10. The principal checks in with the victim on occasion to make sure no new instances of bullying are occurring.

Because bullying is an act of aggression, it makes sense that the one school official charged with discipline, the principal, facilitated each of the ten steps. The involvement of principals and most of these procedures were missing from all the other parents' experiences. For Tom's, Sandra's, and Elizabeth's parents, the "just apologize" alone approach by school officials led to more intense acts of bullying. When the victim was expected to provide an apology to the bullies, a kind of "we are all at fault" approach, this essentially makes the victim apologize for his or her victimization.

Three key actions of Jack's principal are different than what other parents reported. First, the time frame in which the principal engaged in investigating and intervening, from beginning to end—was only 24 hours. Second, the principal called each bully's parent and had their child explain the problem to their parent. Third, the bullies wrote letters to each of the victims' parents. Letter writing can also be helpful as a paper trail in a student's school file if future acts of bullying were to occur.

One controversial step in the process, step four, can be risky for the victim. Bullying behaviors are meant to dominate and often damage the victim, whether directly or indirectly (Olweus, 1993). Bullies may lack empathy (violent bullying for males and the use of indirect bullying for females) and remorse (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). Further, bullies may be socially reinforced by a supporting cast and therefore find the act of bullying more gratifying than the weight of school officials' sanctions (Colvin, Tobin, Beard, Hagan, & Sprague, 1998). Therefore, the risk of the bully making a mockery out of the victim's sharing of how it felt to be bullied can be further damaging. If a school



official asks the victim to go face-to-face with his or her bullies, extreme caution in providing protection for the victim must be given. The victim's permission must be granted; a full ecological approach in addressing any backlash must be considered. The outcome must be to free the victim, not re-victimize. School officials must make the bullies' behaviors the target of focus.

*Public, private, or parochial schools' response.* The argument has been made that the positive intervention is the result of Jack being in a Catholic school. Jack's principal acknowledges, "Of course, they [parents] are writing the checks for tuition; they aren't going to put up with the horsing around." However, check writing alone may not be the deciding variable in school officials' willingness to confront the problem of bullying properly. I received this email two days before beginning writing this section:

Mr. Brown,  
I just found your article and wondered if it was too late to join your study. My son is a seventh grader at a Catholic School in [Somewhereville, Indiana]. We have moved three of our children to another school because of severe bullying and he is still being harassed by the former classmates at his other school. This has escalated to the point that we are working with the diocese of [Somewhereville], but don't feel any support and are looking for help in what direction to take to keep our son safe. He is a good kid and doesn't deserve the hell he has been through for the last two years. I would appreciate any advice you may have.

This email from a mother reminds us that the way school officials respond is not necessarily an issue of public versus private or parochial schools, but of the school official who sees bullying as a serious problem and uses an effective process that addresses the problem in its entirety. That means that school officials must get the bully and his or her parents involved to address the seriousness of the problem and to prevent future instances of bullying. Parents must be made aware that if their child's bullying is

ignored, they are at risk of ignoring a symptom that can lead into future difficulties later in life, e.g., criminal behaviors (Olweus, 1993).

*Help for the bullies.* Evidence suggests school children identified as bullies from age eight are six times more likely to have committed a serious crime as young adults, and by age 30, they are five times more likely to have a serious criminal record compared to non-bullies (Olweus, 1993). As several incidences of bullying first occurred in elementary school and reemerged in middle school, parents of bullies may be grateful for a school intervention or could seek help outside of the school for their child. Taking a complete stance makes it clear to victims, their parents, the bully, and the bully's parents that the abuse is serious and therefore, must end—as many state's anti-bullying laws suggest.

#### *What Anti-bullying Law?*

Tom's dad credits his discovery of Indiana's anti-bullying law to a graduate course he took on school laws. Sandra's mom knew about the law but was unable to produce a hard copy to present to school officials. Such a law being unknown and unpublicized is of little use for the parent trying to protect their bullied children. Schools have an opportunity to provide transparency and accountability by placing their state's anti-bullying law in the student handbook and on the school's website.

The watchdog group Bully Police (2009) points out that a *top rated law* includes provisions that victims of bullying be provided counseling or therapy, paid for by the school district for violence they suffered while at school. Thus far, only Florida and Utah have mandated a procedure be in place to refer victims and perpetrators to counseling. Four parents in this study spontaneously shared that their children had received or still

were receiving mental health counseling services as a result of being bullied. In addition, another parent was making trips to the hospital for medical treatment for their child related to being bullied.

*Legal accountability.* There is an opportunity for Indiana and other states that lack appropriate legal accountability to take the next steps. These steps include spelling out how the bully, the bully's parents, and other participants will be accountable when bullying is reported to a school official. There must be swift timelines to follow regarding investigation, notification, and intervention. If every school is mandated by the state to have specific disciplinary procedures and a specific protocol to follow (e.g., Idaho) when bullying is reported, the bully and his or her family will have to adjust to these legal expectations. This would communicate to the victim and to his or her family that the school official is holding the bully accountable for the violence he or she perpetrates.

Unfortunately, Indiana's anti-bullying law lacks such accountability and effectively provides protection for schools and school officials who do not comply. The last two sentences of SB 0285, Indiana's law ends with the following disclaimer: "This section may not be construed to give rise to a cause of action against a person or school corporation based on an allegation of noncompliance with this section. Noncompliance with this section may not be used as evidence against a school corporation in a cause of action (High, 2009 section 13.5 (c)).

#### *Implications for Social Workers in Schools*

Nowhere in this study was there mention of a social worker being involved with parents, their children, or school officials. However, Cornstable (1999) suggests school

social workers are involved with “the most vulnerable parts of the educational process, where education can break down” (p. 3). The specific areas of physical and mental well-being, education, and social justice are overarching concerns social workers in viewing students in their school environment. Therefore, how the social worker conceptualizes his or her role in providing services for the bullies, the victims, their parents, and school officials can determine their involvement in providing interventions.

Parents in this study identified gaps in service regarding this matter, primarily related to school officials responding ineffectively to children being bullied and not following through with parents. Therefore, a social worker can assess how the social environment is constructed in dealing with issues of school bullying, the processes that are in place, and evaluate the effectiveness of such processes for the bullied children and their parents. These evaluation services by school social workers can provide three benefits: improved parent and school relations, improved protective measures for children and essential help for parents.

Parents in this study often spoke of communication not being completed after a complaint of bullying had been reported. Social workers should include the completion of an intervention as criterion in the evaluation process. A premade form can be a useful protocol for school officials in assessing the steps that were taken to and the outcomes that resulted for both the victims and bullies.

Another area where social workers can address needs is to provide direct service support for victims and bullies. Stevens and colleagues (2001) suggests social workers should be “encouraged to handle more severe bully/victim problems” (p. 157). With victims, school social workers should provide support in areas where victimization from

bullying has compromised functioning, e.g., cognitive strengthening (Berry & Hunt, 2009). For the bully, a school social worker can assess the causes of his or her bullying behavior and with principal support, engage the parent with the youth. This service can potentially lead to family counseling by an outside agency that may be helpful to the bully and the parents in reducing future psychosocial problems that have shown to be related to adult criminal behavior. This relationship between a school social worker and parent of a bully can act as a bridge to outside services.

School social workers must be aware of the disciplinary actions that are applied in the intervention with bullies. Parents in this study shared their frustration with other support staff e.g., counselors and student service representatives who were unable to fulfill the role of disciplinarian in responding to parents' reports of bullying. School social work, as a possible branch of service within the school intervention process, can avoid involvement in disciplinarian responsibilities and allow this to be directed by the principal or assistant principal. This mandate is aligned with school social worker's primary task of providing direct work with children and families, not school discipline (Constable, 1999).

#### *Future Research*

Several areas of future research emerged from this study. The reluctance of school officials to follow their own school discipline codes needs further research. This phenomenon must be looked at in the contexts in which it occurs (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Furlong, Morrison, & Greif, 2003). Further, it is important to understand the perceptions of school officials regarding a full intervention in responding to bullying.

Another area of future research that emerged from this study is how school officials' perceptions of bullies and their parents' community status affect a school official's willingness to intervene. The concern parents raised in this study is that when a bully is popular, or from a "good family" and parents have strong links to the school and community, school officials may be unwilling to fully engage in intervening to protect victimized children. Do bullies or their parents exercise implicit or explicit power that influences a school official's likelihood of turning a blind eye that allows bullying to continue? Future research is needed to examine how social position and community involvement of parents affect decision-making of school officials.

Only one father, Tom's dad, provided the experience of fathers responding to their child's victimization. A larger sample of fathers is needed to understand fathers' perceptions in responding to their child's victimization.

This study's results can be used to generate a grounded survey. Such a survey can be helpful in measuring the prevalence of what occurs categorically to a larger population of parents when they report bullying. This survey could provide descriptive information on existing patterns.

*School officials.* It would be helpful for future research to focus on school officials and their lived experience in intervening with parents and their children who are bullied. What do they experience in the act of intervening? How does the overall school culture influence this response from school officials?

It can be helpful for school officials to remember that by the time parents in this study reported their child being bullied, nearly every parent had used their own process of intervention and found it ineffective. This failure by the parent to reestablish the day-to-

day functioning of their child is brought to school officials as a concern needing strong and immediate attention.

When a parent experiences a lack of involvement, care or follow through by a school official, their child is further victimized through the parent. Tom's mom illustrates this experience, "By the time it was over, we felt like we were victimized as well. We felt helpless." As a result, parents are put in the unexpected position of having to rethink their options in providing basic safety for their child while receiving an education.

*Culture.* A limitation of the current study was the culturally homogeneous nature of the participants. Examining how culture plays a role in parent's responses to bullying can be helpful in looking at interventions from school officials. What do parents from different cultural backgrounds (e.g., African American, Latinos, Koreans, and Whites) tell their children about how to respond to bullying? The impact of culture on parent and student responses must be investigated (Bauer, Lozano, & Rivara, 2007).

Bullying may never be eliminated as evidenced by evaluations of the Olweus whole school bully program. At best, with a concerted effort by school faculty and staff actively following the program, Olweus suggests up to a 50% reduction in school bullying is possible. However, a recent meta-analysis of over 44 programs suggests a 20-23% reduction in bullying is average (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009). Although each school's response to bullying is different, imbedded in its own unique culture, every school needs to pursue best practices in responding to bullying. Assessments of where school officials need additional training and guidance to ensure students and parents are not living under a state of harassed unrest of a bully. School officials, particularly the disciplinarian, must

take the steps to investigate the bullying by assessing aspects of the abuse. The principal must then be willing to follow through on providing sanctions to the bully. Sanctions that follow the student handbook communicate to the bullies and supporting cast that school officials will do what is necessary to ensure victimization stops. Lastly, parents of the victim must be notified and assured the bullies are being held accountable and that their child's victimization has been responded to in a thorough manor.



## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

## Olweus Bullying Definition (1996b)

- We say a student is being bullied when another student, or several students:
- Say mean and hurtful things or make fun of him or her or call him or her mean and hurtful names
  - Completely ignore or exclude him or her from their group of friends or leave him or her out of things on purpose
  - Hit, kick, push, shove around or lock him or her inside a room
  - Tell lies or spread false rumors about him or her or send mean notes and try to make other students dislike him or her
  - And do other hurtful things like that.

When we talk about bullying, these things happen repeatedly, and it is difficult for the student being bullied to defend him or herself. We also call it bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a mean and hurtful way. But we don't call it bullying when teasing is done in a friendly and playful way. Also, it is not bullying when two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight. (p. 6)

## Appendix B

### Types of Reported Bullying

Appendix B									
Percentage of students ages 12–18 who reported selected bullying problems at school during the previous 6 months, by selected student and school characteristics: 2005 (Dinkes et al.)									
		Total	Made fun of, called names or insulted	Subject of rumors	Threatened with harm	Pushed, shoved, tripped, spit on	Tried to make do things did not want to	Excluded from activities on purpose	Property destroyed on
Total		28.1	18.7	14.7	4.8	9	3.5	4.6	3.4
Sex	Male	27.1	18.5	11	5.2	10.9	3.9	4.1	3.5
	Female	29.2	19	18.5	4.4	7.1	3.1	5.2	3.3
Race/ethnicity	White	30	20.1	15.8	5.1	9.7	3.6	5.3	3.4
	Black	28.5	18.5	14.2	4.9	8.9	4.7	4.5	4.6
	Hispanic	22.3	14.7	12.4	4.6	7.6	2.6	3	2.7
	Other	24.6	16.3	11.6	2.1	6.8	2.1	2.5	2.5!
Grade	6th	36.6	26.3	16.4	6.4	15.1	4.4	7.4	3.9
	7th	35	25.2	18.9	6.3	15.4	4.7	7.1	4.6
	8th	30.4	20.4	14.3	4.3	11.3	3.8	5.4	4.5
	9th	28.1	18.9	13.8	5.3	8.2	3.2	3.8	2.7
	10th	24.9	15.5	13.6	4.9	6.8	3.6	3.6	2.9
	11th	23	14.7	13.4	3.2	4.2	2.8	3.3	2.6
Urbanicity	12th	19.9	11.3	12.5	3.5	2.9	1.8	2.2	2.4
	Urban	26	17.7	13.3	5.5	8.5	4.1	4.9	3.9
	Suburban	28.9	18.9	14.6	4.4	9	3.1	4.5	3
Sector	Rural	29	19.8	17.2	5	9.9	3.7	4.5	3.8
	Public	28.6	19	14.9	5.1	9.3	3.5	4.5	3.5
	Private	22.7	15.3	12.4	0.9	5.5	3	6.2	2!

! Interpret data with caution.  
‡ Reporting standards not met.

1 Injury includes bruises or swelling; cuts, scratches, or scrapes; black eye or bloody nose; teeth chipped or knocked out; broken bones or internal injuries; knocked unconscious; or other injuries. Only students who reported that their bullying incident constituted being pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on were asked if they suffered injuries as a result of the incident.

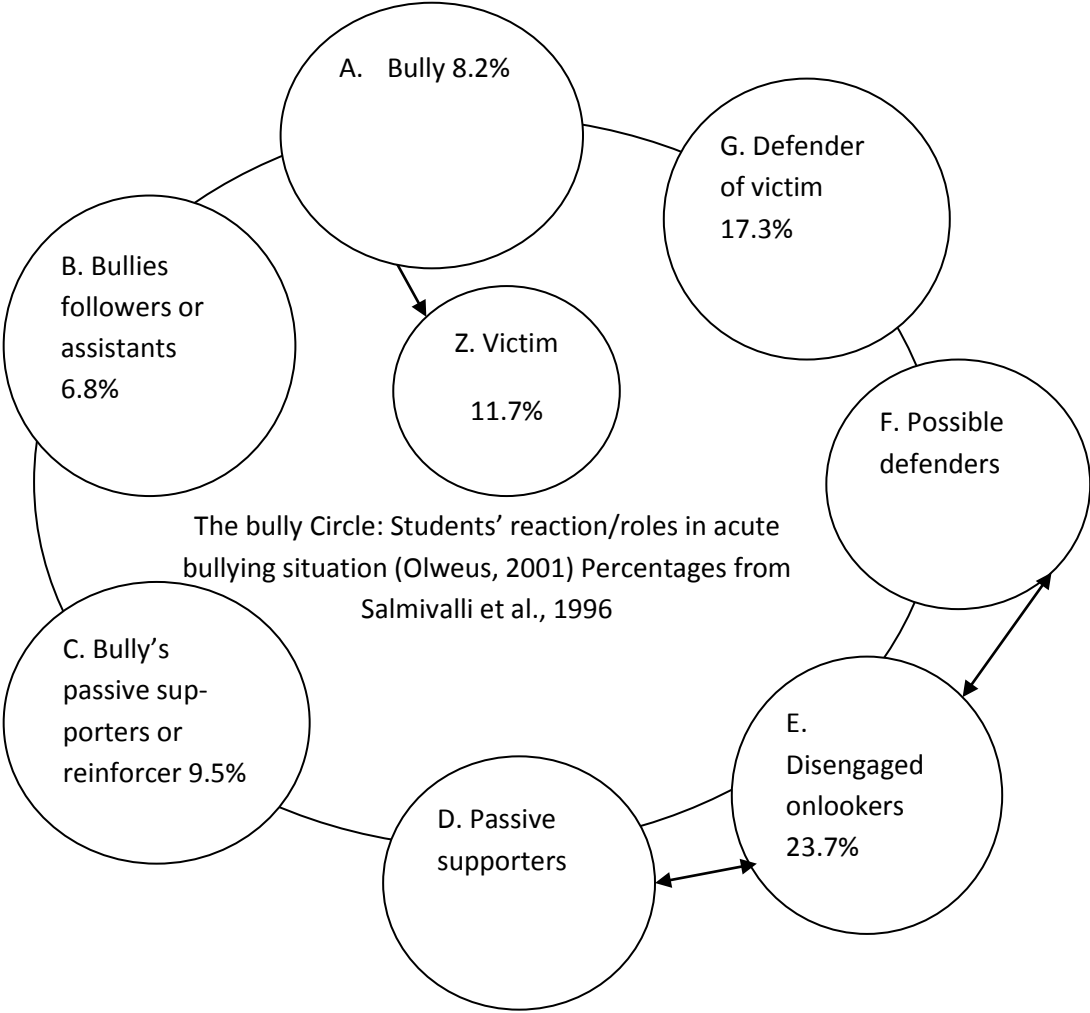
2 Other includes American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, and more than one race. For this report, non-Hispanic students who identified themselves as more than one race were included in the Other category. Respondents who identified themselves as being of Hispanic origin are classified as Hispanic, regardless of their race.

NOTE: "At school" includes the school building, on school property, on a school bus, or going to and from school. In 2005, the unit response rate for this survey did not meet NCES statistical standards; therefore, interpret the data with caution. Population size for students ages 12–18 is 25,811,000 in 2005. Location totals may sum to more than 100 because students could have been bullied in more than one location.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey, 2005. From Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2006" by R. Dinkes, E.F. Cataldi, G. Kena, and K. Baum, 2006, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington D.C.:U.S.

Appendix C

Olweus Bullying Circle



## Appendix D

## Bully Police Grading Criteria

# MAKING THE GRADE

## How States are "Graded" on their Anti Bullying Laws

by Brenda High, Executive Director

### Effective anti bullying laws will cover these points:

#### 1) The word "bullying" must be used in the text of the bill/law/statutes.

Some words being used in State bill texts are, "hate crimes" harassment, discrimination, or intimidation. While all these words find meaning in the act of bullying, using these terms do not always apply to school bullying situations. Most adults don't even understand what the definition of a "hate crime" is, but everyone knows what a bully is.

#### 2) The law must clearly be an anti bullying law, not a school safety law.

A good anti bullying law speaks to the rights of the individual student and their personal safety, not if the building itself is safe. Of course, it's important to have school building safety addressed also, but they are not one and the same.

#### 3) There must be definitions of bullying and harassment.

Defining the problem is the key to solving the problem.

**There should not be any major emphasis on defining victims.** This addition into an anti bullying law will cause several problems for lawmakers:

- Any child can be victimized by a bully. Remember that bullies bully because they can, and because they can get away with it.
- The way a bully's target or victim acts or physically looks is not the victims problem but the bully's own psychological problem. The bully is the root of the problem.
- Defining victims will slow the process of lawmaking, dividing political parties who will argue over which victims get special rights over other victims.

All children deserve the "special right" not to be bullied. ALL children who are bullied need to be protected.

**4) There should be recommendations about how to make policy and what needs to be in the model policy.**

No State Superintendent, School district, School, or even individual for that matter, likes to be left with no instruction on how to implement a project, program, policy or law. An anti bullying law can be enacted without direct funding (no fiscal impact), but no anti bullying policy can be enacted without directions, rules, or a path to follow. (See Washington law for an anti bullying law with no fiscal impact - [www.bullypolice.org/wa\\_law.html](http://www.bullypolice.org/wa_law.html))

**5) A good law involves education specialists at all levels, starting with the State Superintendent's (Education) office, though the School Districts, Schools, Parents and Students. Together they can define and set rules, policies, and find and implement the best anti bullying programs. Laws should require anti bullying training, anti bullying education for students and staff as well as prevention programs.**

When everyone gets involved to solve the bullying problems, everyone will benefit and will support those working to implement the anti bullying policies and programs.

It would also be a good idea for the State Superintendent's Office to post the model programs, rules, and policies that they have researched on their websites. (Check out this model Washington State anti bullying policy at [www.bullypolice.org/bullying\\_policy.html](http://www.bullypolice.org/bullying_policy.html))

**6) A good law mandates anti bullying programs, not suggests programs.**

Making a "suggestion" or "recommendation" is weak and useless wording for any law. If the U.S. Government only *recommended* that we pay taxes, there would be no government programs, jobs, or organization within government at all. The word, "**SHALL**" is an excellent mandating word for an anti bullying policy or law. With all the free anti bullying programs and all the grant money currently being given to schools to start anti bullying programs, there is little excuse not to have a good anti bullying program.

**7) Laws should include a date the model policy is due, when the schools need to have their policies in place, (in keeping with the anti bullying law requirements), and when the anti bullying programs must be in effect.**

Every kid wants to know when the homework has to be turned in.

**8) There must be protection against reprisal, retaliation or false accusation.**

A victim should never have to worry about being victimized twice for talking about his abuser. The number one bullying tactic of a bully is to blame his victim for the circumstances, (the number one lie being, "He started it!"). Good school records and common sense will prevail in most questionable cases

that come to the Principal's office. False accusations should result in suspension or expulsion from school. Anonymous reporting procedures should be implemented in each school.

### **9) There must be school district protection against lawsuits upon compliance to policies.**

If efforts by teachers and administrators are made to stop the bullying by reporting, documenting, punishing, expelling, or correcting the bullying situation, than no teacher or administrator should fear a lawsuit by a victim of bullying. Parents of bullies need to be put on notice that they can be personally sued for the behavior of their child, if they make no efforts to stop their child from bullying after notification of that bullying. This can go the other way, of course. If bullying is reported by parents and the school doesn't react or comply with policies, parents have every right to sue for damages. (see the trial briefs for High vs. Pasco School District - in the wrongful death, "bullycide", of Jared High [www.jaredstory.com/the\\_lawsuit.html](http://www.jaredstory.com/the_lawsuit.html))

### **10) A top rated law will put the emphasis on the victims of bullying by assigning counseling for victims who suffer for years after peer abuse.**

Victims are tired of hearing about the bullies, and the services they should get to help them stop bullying. Victims suffer all their lives as survivors of bullying. According to a report put out by the FBI, victims of bullying, who became bullies themselves, are responsible for three out of four of the school shootings. Although the number of suicides caused from bullying have not been researched, these numbers are likely a much higher number than the (sensationalized in the press) numbers of deaths caused from school shootings. These bullying victims take out their anger on themselves, rather than face the pain of abuse at school or endure the depression that was caused from bullying at school. Victims of bullying should take top billing when it comes to getting help by empowerment programs, therapy, counseling or paid medical expenses.

States with an emphasis on counseling victims will receive a **plus** after obtaining an **A** rating. Some states now have an **A++** rating, such as **Delaware, Florida and Kentucky** because they have a counseling clause **and** have also added a Cyberbullying clause.

### **11) There must be accountability reports made to either Lawmakers or the State Education Superintendent and there must be a consequence assigned to schools/districts who don't comply to the law. There should be mandatory posting and/or notification of policies and reporting procedures for students and parents.**

Someone needs to keep track of what's happening in each school and school district when complying with an anti bullying law. Who will grade each school's performance? How will anyone know if adjustments or improvements need to be made? You don't ask a child to empty the trash for the first time and trust that it will be done the first time. Trust must be earned. Being accountable for our actions/laws creates trust.

### **12) Cyberbullying or "Electronic Harassment" law.**

Having a cyberbullying clause in a law is essential as cyberbullying is becoming a chronic social issue. Although state laws can't address harassment on the internet from state to state, they can address it from school to school within their state AND require that the school districts themselves keep a tight lid on what's going on inside their schools. It is the saddest thing in the world for a child to, not only be bullied in their school, but for the bullying to continue when they leave the school and go to their homes.

States with a cyberbullying clause will receive a plus after obtaining an A rating.

### 13) Outlaw Middle School/Jr. High

...I'm just joking here - or am I?

---

All States with no anti bullying laws get an **F** (0 points)

States with worthless anti bullying laws, get a **D** (2 points or less)

States with mediocre laws, get a **C** (3-5 points)

States with acceptable laws get a **B** (6-8 points)

States who have near perfect laws get **A's** (9+ points)

All plus's (+) and minus (-) are at the option of this writer, and are opinion. This entire grading system is, of course, opinion (but top rated, experienced opinion).

(Note: No State gets an **A+** unless there is an emphasis on victims or a bullying victim's rights clause about getting free counseling or a cyberbullying clause.)

(Note: No State gets an **A++** unless there is an emphasis on victims or a bullying victim's rights clause about getting free counseling AND a **CYBERBULLYING clause**.)

## Appendix E

## Indiana Anti-Bullying Law

**INDIANA**

First Regular Session 114th General Assembly (2005)

**PRINTING CODE.** Amendments: Whenever an existing statute (or a section of the Indiana Constitution) is being amended, the text of the existing provision will appear in this style type, additions will appear in this style type, and deletions will appear in this style type.

Additions: Whenever a new statutory provision is being enacted (or a new constitutional provision adopted), the text of the new provision will appear in this style type. Also, the word NEW will appear in that style type in the introductory clause of each SECTION that adds a new provision to the Indiana Code or the Indiana Constitution. Conflict reconciliation: Text in a statute in this style type or this style type reconciles conflicts between statutes enacted by the 2004 Regular Session of the General Assembly.

**SENATE ENROLLED ACT No. 285**

AN ACT to amend the Indiana Code concerning education.  
Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Indiana:

SOURCE: IC 5-2-10.1-2; (05)SE0285.1.1. --> SECTION 1. IC 5-2-10.1-2 IS AMENDED TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2005]: Sec. 2. (a) The Indiana safe schools fund is established to do the following:

- (1) Promote school safety through the:
  - (A) purchase of equipment for the detection of firearms and other weapons;
  - (B) use of dogs trained to detect firearms, drugs, explosives, and illegal substances; and
  - (C) purchase of other equipment and materials used to enhance the safety of schools.
- (2) Combat truancy.
- (3) Provide matching grants to schools for school safe haven programs.
- (4) Provide grants for school safety and safety plans.
- (5) Provide educational outreach and training to school personnel concerning:**
  - (A) the identification of;**
  - (B) the prevention of; and**
  - (C) intervention in; bullying.**
- (b) The fund consists of amounts deposited:**
  - (1) under IC 33-37-9-4; and**
  - (2) from any other public or private source.**
- (c) The institute shall determine grant recipients from the fund with a priority on awarding grants in the following order:
  - (1) A grant for a safety plan.
  - (2) A safe haven grant requested under section 10 of this chapter.
  - (3) A safe haven grant requested under section 7 of this chapter.
- (d) Upon recommendation of the council, the institute shall establish a method for determining the maximum amount a grant recipient may receive under this section.

SOURCE: IC 5-2-10.1-11; (05)SE0285.1.2. --> SECTION 2. IC 5-2-10.1-11 IS AMENDED TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2005]: Sec. 11. (a) The school safety specialist training and certification program is established.

- (b) The school safety specialist training program shall provide:
  - (1) annual training sessions, which may be conducted through distance learning or at regional centers;



and

(2) information concerning best practices and available resources; for school safety specialists and county school safety commissions.

**(c) The department of education shall do the following:**

(1) Assemble an advisory group of school safety specialists from around the state to make recommendations concerning the curriculum and standards for school safety specialist training.

**(2) Develop an appropriate curriculum and the standards for the school safety specialist training and certification program. The department of education may consult with national school safety experts in developing the curriculum and standards. The curriculum developed under this subdivision must include training in identifying, preventing, and intervening in bullying.**

(3) Administer the school safety specialist training program and notify the institute of candidates for certification who have successfully completed the training program.

**(d) The institute shall do the following:**

(1) Establish a school safety specialist certificate.

(2) Review the qualifications of each candidate for certification named by the department of education.

(3) Present a certificate to each school safety specialist that the institute determines to be eligible for certification. SOURCE: IC 5-2-10.1-12; (05)SE0285.1.3. --> SECTION 3. IC 5-2-10.1-12 IS ADDED TO THE INDIANA CODE AS A NEW SECTION TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2005]: **Sec. 12. (a) Each school within a school corporation shall establish a safe school committee. The committee may be a subcommittee of the committee that develops the strategic and continuous school improvement and achievement plan under IC 20-10.2-3.**

**(b) The department of education and the school corporation's school safety specialist shall provide materials to assist a safe school committee in developing a plan for the school that addresses the following issues:**

**(1) Unsafe conditions, crime prevention, school violence, bullying, and other issues that prevent the maintenance of a safe school.**

**(2) Professional development needs for faculty and staff to implement methods that decrease problems identified under subdivision (1).**

**(3) Methods to encourage:**

**(A) involvement by the community and students;**

**(B) development of relationships between students and school faculty and staff; and**

**(C) use of problem solving teams.**

SOURCE: IC 20-8.1-5.1-0.2; (05)SE0285.1.4. --> SECTION 4. IC 20-8.1-5.1-0.2 IS ADDED TO THE INDIANA CODE AS A NEW SECTION TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2005]: **Sec. 0.2. As used in this chapter, "bullying" means overt, repeated acts or gestures, including:**

**(1) verbal or written communications transmitted;**

**(2) physical acts committed; or**

**(3) any other behaviors committed;**

**by a student or group of students against another student with the intent to harass, ridicule, humiliate, intimidate, or harm the other student.**

SOURCE: IC 20-8.1-5.1-7.7; (05)SE0285.1.5. --> SECTION 5. IC 20-8.1-5.1-7.7 IS ADDED TO THE INDIANA CODE AS A NEW SECTION TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2005]: **Sec. 7.7. (a) Discipline rules adopted by the governing body of a school corporation under section 7 of this chapter must:**

**(1) prohibit bullying; and**

**(2) include provisions concerning education, parental involvement, reporting, investigation, and intervention. (b) The discipline rules described in subsection (a) must apply when a student is:**

**(1) on school grounds immediately before or during school hours, immediately after school hours, or at any other time when the school is being used by a school group;**

**(2) off school grounds at a school activity, function, or event;**

**(3) traveling to or from school or a school activity, function, or event; or**

**(4) using property or equipment provided by the school.**

**(c) This section may not be construed to give rise to a cause of action against a person or school**

corporation based on an allegation of noncompliance with this section. Noncompliance with this section may not be used as evidence against a school corporation in a cause of action.

**SECTION 6. IC 20-33-8-0.2 IS ADDED TO THE INDIANA CODE AS A NEW SECTION TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2005]: Sec. 0.2. As used in this chapter, "bullying"**

- means overt, repeated acts or gestures, including:**
- (1) verbal or written communications transmitted;**
  - (2) physical acts committed; or**
  - (3) any other behaviors committed;**

**by a student or group of students against another student with the intent to harass, ridicule, humiliate, intimidate, or harm the other student.**

SOURCE: IC 20-33-8-13.5; (05)SE0285.1.7. --> **SECTION 7. IC 20-33-8-13.5 IS ADDED TO THE INDIANA CODE AS A NEW SECTION TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2005]: Sec. 13.5. (a) Discipline rules adopted by the governing body of a school corporation under section 12 of this chapter must:**

- (1) prohibit bullying; and**
- (2) include provisions concerning education, parental involvement, reporting, investigation, and intervention.**

**(b) The discipline rules described in subsection (a) must apply when a student is:**

- (1) on school grounds immediately before or during school hours, immediately after school hours, or at any other time when the school is being used by a school group;**
- (2) off school grounds at a school activity, function, or event;**
- (3) traveling to or from school or a school activity, function, or event; or**
- (4) using property or equipment provided by the school.**

**(c) This section may not be construed to give rise to a cause of action against a person or school corporation based on an allegation of noncompliance with this section. Noncompliance with this section may not be used as evidence against a school corporation in a cause of action.**

## Appendix F

## Terms of Phenomenology with Heideggarian Emphasis

- Dasein: *Being* in the world (Koch, 1995)
- Essence: The very nature of what is being questioned (Sadala & Adorno, 2002, p. 283)
- Exemplars: Salient excerpts that characterize specific common themes or meanings across informants. They are parts of stories, or instances that have similar meanings across informants (Crist & Tanner, 2003, p. 204)
- Hermeneutic circle: an analytical process aimed at enhancing understanding, offers a particular emphasis in qualitative analysis, namely, relating parts to the wholes, and holes to the parts (Patton, 2002, p. 497)
- Hermeneutics: Function of words in bringing about understanding through language; dealing with the moment that meaning comes to light; revelation (Palmer, 1969b, p. 161 & 156) (Ontological) power of understanding and interpretation which renders possible the disclosure of being of things and ultimately of the potentialities of Dasein's own being (Palmer, 1969a, p. 139)
- Holding Open: Questioning the possibilities around the narrative while keeping one's eye on the original focus on the inquiry. There is always excess of meaning.
- Interpretation: Achieving correctness among several possible interpretations; going behind it; being open to what is yet unsaid (Palmer, 1969b, pp. 146-147)
- Logos: Brings it [letting something appear] out of concealment into the light of day (Palmer, 1969b, p. 128)
- Noesis and noema: Being is the correlate of and is accessible only through Dasein's understanding of being (Cuputo, 1993, p. 339)
- Ontology: What is the nature of the knowable; reality. Realities exist in multiple mental constructs (Palmer, 1969b, p. 129)
- Ontology (Heidegger's): An enquiry into the manner in which the structures of being are revealed through the structures of human existence, as enquiry, which could only be carried out through phenomenology, now transformed into hermeneutical phenomenology, since the phenomenon of existence always require interpretation and hermeneutics is the art of interpretation (Moran, 2000, p. 197)
- Paradigm cases: Are vibrant stories that are particularly compelling and to which the team tends to return, to examine from new perspectives (Crist & Tanner, 2003, p. 204)
- Phenomenonism: There can be no knowledge except by phenomenon; sense given data; All known things are phenomenon; there are no things in themselves. That which shows itself, the manifested; revealed (Palmer, 1969b)
- Phenomenology: a way of staying true to what must be thought (Harman, 2007, p. 155)
- Phronesis: A process wherein the application of a specific act of intellection cannot be divorced either from the particular circumstance that give rise to it or from the particular person who is engaged in it. This is to say phronesis is both at once an intellectual capacity and a mode of being; it is an experiential phenomenon in which the means of acting and the product of the act occur simultaneously within the situation itself (Coltman, 1998, pp. 21-22)

- Questioning: A way man [and woman] contends with and draws being into showing itself. It bridges the ontological difference between being and the being of beings; a way of being open (Palmer, 1969b, p. 150)
- Reflexivity: The awareness of my contribution to the construction of meaning throughout the process of research and the acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining outside of myself. Therefore, documenting decisions, shifts in thinking, and assumptions within the researcher that impact the research (Guba, 1981)
- Thinking: Responsiveness rather than manipulation of ideas (Palmer, 1969b, p. 141)
- Understanding: All understanding is temporal, intentional, and historical (Palmer, 1969b, p. 140)
- Violence on text: The actual interpretation must show what does not stand in the words [unspoken] and is nevertheless *said* (Palmer, 1969b, p. 157)

Appendix G

Brochure/Flyer

# Parent: Has your middle school child been *bullied*?

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An Indiana researcher is looking for parents or guardians who reported in-person to a middle school official that their child was being bullied at school or on the bus.



If you or any parent or guardian you know has had this experience and would like to be interviewed for this study, please take a flyer and contact the researcher below.

---

James Brown, IU School of Social Work, PhD Candidate:  
**317 557-2073**

## Appendix H

### Parents Who Report Bullying to a School Official:

#### *Parents who reported bullying to a school official* initial phone contact:

Thank you for sharing an interest in participating for interviews regarding your experience as parent who decides to report their junior high or middle school child was or is being bullied to a school official. This study is being used for dissertation requirements for the IUPUI School of Social Work. If at any time, you wish to end your involvement in this study, you may do so without any expectation in having to continue.

Results of this study may be published in a scholarly journal at a future date. This could include direct quotes from you. However, each participant will be assigned a false name to safeguard personal identity. This includes safeguarding information pertaining to your child's name, the principal's name, teacher's and school's name. However, the state of Indiana will be recognized as the area in which all participants were willing to share their stories. If you would like to share your experience and be a participant in this study, please answer these following questions and email the answers back to: [jrb2@iupui.edu](mailto:jrb2@iupui.edu)

This study is looking for parents that have certain characteristics. I would like to ask several questions and see if you agree or disagree with them. The first question is:

- 1) Do you speak fluent English Yes or No;
- 2) Have you reported bullying in an Indiana Middle school between Fall 2005 and Fall 2009;
- 3) Are you a K-12 public school employee in your child's school district;
- 4) Have you spoken to a middle school official who could take disciplinary action, e.g., by suspending the bully and arranging a meeting with parents;
- 5) Has your child received only regular education services during the time of bullying and reporting;
- 6) I would like to read you a definition if it fits with what occurred with your child being bullied. We say a student is being bullied when another student, or several students:
  - Say mean and hurtful things or make fun of him or her or call him or her mean and hurtful names
  - Completely ignore or exclude him or her from their group of friends or leave him or her out of things on purpose
  - Hit, kick, push, shove around or lock him or her inside a room

- Tell lies or spread false rumors about him or her or send mean notes and try to make other students dislike him or her
- And do other hurtful things like that.

When we talk about bullying, these things happen repeatedly, and it is difficult for the student being bullied to defend him or herself. We also call it bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a mean and hurtful way. But we don't call it bullying when teasing is done in a friendly and playful way. Also, it is not bullying when two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight. (p. 6) Can you tell me if this definition fits in what was happening to your child? Which part?

Response choices from me as researcher:

- A. Yes, (if criteria of study is met) it sounds like your experience is a great match for this study on bullying. If you are still interested in taking part of this study, I would like to meet with you. What the study requires is two interviews. The first must be face to face and can last up to one and a half hours. The second may also be face to face or can be done over the telephone for your convenience. The second interview is typically less time consuming. When we meet, I will go over a consent form that outlines the entire study, safeguards, and your willingness to participate. Then I would like to interview you by asking several questions about your experience. The interview will be tape recorded so I can write it up. Then I will compare your experience with other participants and look for similarities and differences.

Because comfort and convenience is important, there are several options we have in places to meet for the interviews. The first option allows up to meet at IUPUI at the school of social work at New York St at a private office. The second option we can meet at an office on 4755 Kingsway Drive, in the Willow brook Office Park off North Keystone Avenue off of 46th Street. The third option is meeting at a public library. Lastly, there is the option of meeting at your home for the interviews. What would be most convenient for you?

- B. No, (if criteria for study is not met) it sounds like your experience in school bullying is different than what we are looking for with this study. However, I do appreciate your time and thoughtfulness in wanting to participate in this study.

## Appendix I

Parent Demographic Information

Participant # \_\_\_\_\_

Would you say your child's school where the bullying was reported, is urban, rural, or suburban?

What is the name of the school?

Was there any prior involvement with the school before the first report of bullying was made?

What grade was your child in when the bullying started?

What grade was your child in when you reported it to the middle school official?

What ethnic or cultural category would you classify yourself as?

How did you hear about this study?

Your occupation:

Spouse's occupation:

Were you born in the same community your child was/is being bullied?



## Appendix J

### *A Parent's Step-By-Step Approach to Advocate for Their Bullied Child*

As show from this study, when parents notice their middle school youth acting in a way that suggests turmoil (e.g., kicking the family pet or not wanting to go or have friends come over), may indicate being bullied. As also shown from this study, when a parent does discover victimization, instead of relying on their advice giving to their child, what can be more effective is speaking directly with the school disciplinarian about the problem. Specifically, asking how he or she handles cases of reported bullying. Learning what steps the principal will take to provide safety from the bullies can help indicate if the principal will avoid re-victimize the victim e.g., moving the victim's locker or making the victim and bully apologize to one another. What a parent needs to hear is how the bully will be held accountable and how their parents will be notified if the abuse is substantiated.

If a child is being physically assaulted or robbed through acts of bullying, or his or her life is being threatened, these offenses are criminal acts and parents can call the police to have a police report made. The police report communicates that the aggressive act was not only a violation of the victim's rights, but a criminal act. This option provides a parent with a clear message to the bullies, their parents, and to school officials that communicates, "I am serious about ensuring that my child is safe and I will make sure his or her legal rights and personal safety are honored." Further, it provides a paper trail if the bullies continue to abuse.

For parents, it is important to keep a file of all communication notes, reports, records, and agreements that include what, where, when and with whom contact was made. Also in the file keep all important resources related to bullying. One important resource is having a copy of the state's anti-bullying law—if there is one. A copy of your state's anti-bullying or anti-harassment law may be found at [BullyPolice.org](http://BullyPolice.org). Becoming acquainted with the law shows school officials that you as a parent know what is expected of them, outside of their own school discipline policies found in the student handbook.

### *Steps in engaging School Officials*

In the first step, the assistant principal or school disciplinarian must be made aware of the bullying through parent reporting (See illustrative diagram below). As was found in this study, by reporting to anyone else the communication can be compromised, e.g., school official stating, “It’s verbal bullying; we have no proof” or parents not receiving a call back from other school officials. Be clear that you expect this problem to be resolved and your child to be safe. Emailing the principal afterwards is a nice way to express your understanding of what she or he stated that addressed resolving the problem. Note in the email what is similar or different from the student handbook for handling bullying. The student handbook usually states consequences for first time offences of students who bully—make sure the principal follows his or her own discipline policy. If this action fails to resolve the bullying for a child, the principal’s boss is the superintendent.

In the second step, inform the superintendent of the problem. Inform him or her of your reporting to the principal, and the result of that report. Ask the superintendent for support by letting her or him know to set up a meeting with the principal and any other necessary school staff involved. Be clear what you expect: your child to be safe, each bully's parent called, and the bully held accountable for the abuse. If the superintendent is unable or unwilling to intercede in a way that corrects the problem, the next step is to go to his or her boss: the school board.

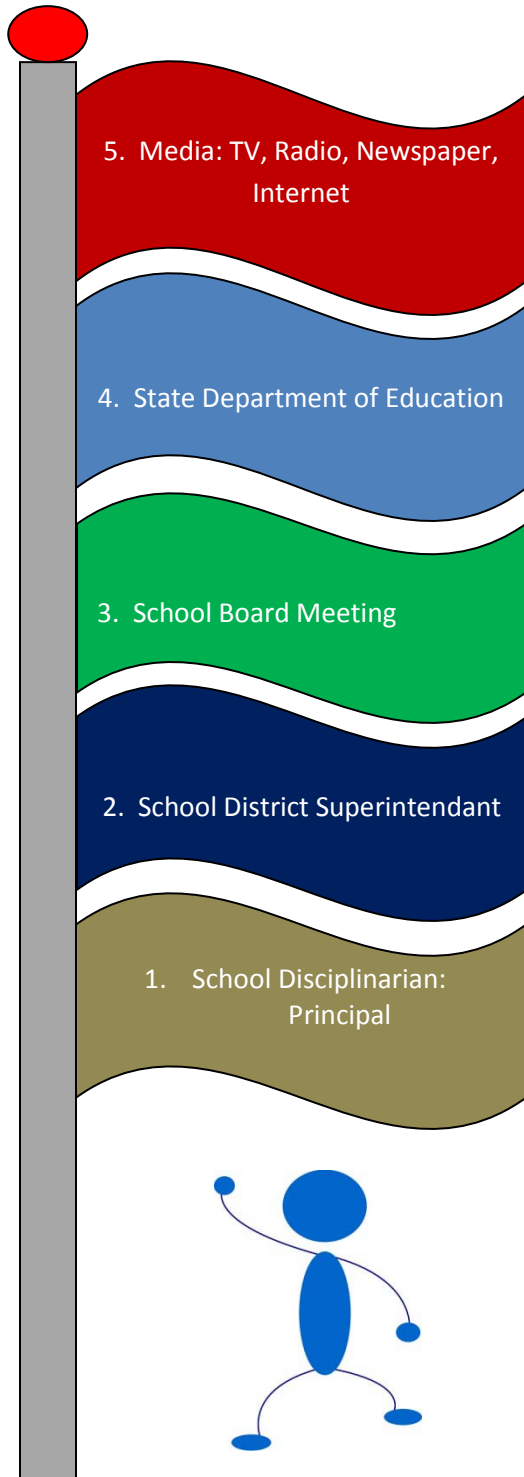
In the third step, engagement with the school board may happen in two ways. First, calling the superintendent's office and asking to be put on the next board agenda. If a deadline has passed to be placed on the monthly agenda, the parent may still attend the meeting to address the problem. This occurs when the board asks for "Comments from the public." During this time, a parent can let the school board know:

- A. Who they are as a parent,
- B. Something positive about the school or district to invite listening,
- B. The bullying concern,
- C. Specific efforts made by the parent in reporting to the principal and superintendent,
- D. The results of the steps taken (or not taken),
- E. What is happening to the child as a result, and,
- F. What you expect for your child: For school officials to take the appropriate steps to end the bullying so your child can be safe and can get his or her education.

If this request remains unfulfilled, the fourth step would be contacting the State Department of Education for assistance. In that letter or meeting, parents should provide the documentation of the events that have occurred and with whom.

If this does not leverage safety, the final step would be to contact your local newspapers and television news for an interview. Make sure to go over the steps that you have followed, the documentation you have accumulated, and your wishes for the safety of your child to be honored while he or she is at school.

As an additional source of support, there are parent groups available on the web that have begun to offer aid in sharing their child's story of school responses and providing tips on protective alternatives your child may need. If you see your child showing behavioral changes that you believe are a result of being bullied, consider finding a reputable therapist who works with victimized youth.



Parents addressing school officials by taking steps starting with the principal to protect their child from school bullies' victimization.

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CURRICULUM VITAE  
James Roger Brown

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EDUCATION

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Indiana University School of Social Work, Minor Concentration: Education Indianapolis, Indiana	PhD, 2010
University of Michigan, School of Social Work Ann Arbor, Michigan	M.S.W., 1993
Northern Michigan University School of Social Work Marquette, Michigan	B.S.W., 1992

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HONORS, AWARDS, & FELLOWSHIPS

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The Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine <i>Young Investigators Final 4 Award Finalist</i> 2010 Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine Annual Meeting Toronto, Canada April 8, 2010	2010
Indiana University, Indianapolis <i>Riley Adolescent Medicine Fellowship</i> Leadership & Education in Adolescent Health	2007-2009
Indiana University, Indianapolis School of Social Work <i>Certificate of Recognition for Excellence in Teaching</i> <i>For Outstanding Performance and Lasting Contribution</i>	2008
Indiana University, Indianapolis <i>IUPUI Jaguars Favorite Professor Award</i>	2006-2007
Gladwin Community Schools <i>Advocate for Child and Family Award</i>	1999-2000
Northern Michigan University <i>Social Work Student of the Year</i>	1990-1991
Northern Michigan University <i>Student Leadership Award</i>	1990-1991



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TEACHING EXPERIENCES

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PhD Student Teaching Mentor <i>S623 Practice Research Integrative Seminar</i> <i>Evaluating Teaching Pedagogy for PhD Student Teacher</i> Sponsored by David Westhuis, MSW Program Director, IUPUI	2008-2009
Adjunct Instructor: S-332 <i>Generalist Social Work: Theory and Practice Skills II</i> Indiana University, Indianapolis	2007-2008
Adjunct Instructor: S-231 <i>Generalist Social Work: Theory and Practice Skills</i> Indiana University, Indianapolis	2006-2007

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INVITED LECTURER

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PhD Integrative Seminar: First Year Students Overcoming Psycho-Emotional Barriers Margaret Adamek, PhD	Fall, 2009
S721 Scholarly Writing Seminar <i>Understanding Procedures in Using Endnote X2 Citation Software</i> Margaret Adamek, PhD	Fall, 2008
S433 Macro Practice <i>Integrating the Self and Social Work into Vulnerable Communities</i> Carmen Luca Sugawara, Ph.D.	Fall, 2008
Central Indiana Sarcoidosis Support Group <i>Couples Coping with Sarcoidosis: Preliminary Findings</i> In partnership with Professor James Daley, PhD	Spring, 2008
S100 Understanding Diversity in a Pluralistic Society <i>Responding to Emotional Content</i> Donna Pittman, MSW, Adjunct	Spring, 2008
S623 Practice Research Integrated Seminar <i>Experiential Program Evaluation</i> Margaret Adamek, PhD	2006-2008
S504 Professional Practice Skills I <i>Using Adventure Based Methods in Working with Clients</i> Phil Suman, MSW, Adjunct	Spring, 2007

S682 Assessment Mental Health and Addictions  
*Using Adventure Based Methods to Assess Clients*  
David Wilkerson, MSW, Adjunct

Fall, 2005

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SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE EXPERIENCE

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Neighborhood Self Employment Initiative, Indianapolis Indiana 2006-2009  
*Client Life-Coach*

- Provided assessment and intervention service
- Motivational interviewing
- Consultation with Business counselors

Gladwin Community Schools, Gladwin Michigan 1997-2005  
*Junior High School Regular Education School Social Worker*

- Provided diagnostic and intervention services
- Used adventure therapy to assess and intervene with students
- Provided weekly groups to emotionally impaired population:  
*– adventure, children of divorce, friendship, and death and dying*
- Provided child and parent interventions
- Provided student truancy interventions
- Provided grade-level trainings to identify and address bullying
- Provided conflict resolution with student and teachers
- Collaborated with community mental health
- After school programs coach for vulnerable youth

Gladwin Community Schools, Gladwin Michigan 1995-1997  
*Elementary Regular Education School Social Worker*

- Provided diagnostic and intervention services
- Provided whole classroom group services
- Provided individual play therapy for children
- Provided parent coaching
- Provided afterschool workshops for parents
- Provided support for teachers
- Coordinated a student conflict-resolution program
- Collaborated with community mental health

Alpena-Montmorency-Alcona Educational Service District 1993-1995  
*Special Education School Social Worker, Alpena Michigan*  
Servicing Four School Districts, Ages, 4-21, and 18 Schools

- Provided diagnostic services for children suspected  
*– of an emotional or learning disability*
- Provided autism diagnostic services
- Provided weekly in-school adventure groups for k-9<sup>th</sup> grade youth
- Provided three year re-evaluation diagnostic testing for youth

Marquette County Child and Family Services <i>Foster Care Caseworker, Marquette Michigan</i>	1992
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provided semi-structured family visits,</li> <li>– Provided support for foster parents and youth,</li> <li>– Provided quarterly updated services plans,</li> <li>– Worked with lawyers in termination of parental rights,</li> <li>– Worked with families in goal setting, skill development, and family reunification</li> </ul>	

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PROFESSIONAL FACILITATOR EXPERIENCES

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59 <sup>th</sup> Annual North American Christian Social Work Convention Facilitator: <i>Love Like the Hippie</i> Indianapolis, Indiana	Fall, 2009
Sarcoidosis Patient Education Retreat <i>Facilitating Partner Discussions on Chronic Illness</i> Indianapolis, Indiana	Fall, 2009
Society of Adolescent Medicine Co-Facilitator: <i>Adolescent Health Professionals in Training</i> Los Angeles, California	Spring, 2009
Plainfield Re-Entry Educational Facility (PREF) Group Facilitator for Domestic Violence Offenders <i>Using Verbal Judo to Disarm Put-Downs</i> Plainfield, Indiana	Fall, 2008
Reducing the Risks: Hoosier Teens Talk Health Youth Health Summit Facilitator: <i>Bullying Prevention: Responding to Verbal Assaults</i> Indianapolis, Indiana	Spring, 2008
Indianapolis Sarcoidosis Support Group Co-Facilitator: <i>Developing Skills in Living with A Spouse Who Suffers With a Chronic Illness: From the Personal to the Protective</i> Indianapolis, Indiana	Spring, 2008
National Association of Social Workers 30 <sup>th</sup> Annual Professional Education Development Conference Co-facilitator: <i>A Community-based Family Strengthening Multi-Family Intervention Program to Respond to Adolescents At-Risk</i> Indianapolis, Indiana	Fall, 2006

14 <sup>th</sup> Annual Association of Experiential Education Conference Facilitator: <i>Verbal Judo: Teaching Kids How to Respond When Verbally Attacked</i> Potosi, Missouri	Spring, 2005
Children's Hospital of Michigan Daylong Pediatric Medicine Training Lead Facilitator: <i>Using Effective Ways of Communicating During Stress</i> Detroit, Michigan	Fall, 2004
West Midland Family Center Facilitator: <i>Parents in Transition: Helping Children Cope with the Changes in Family</i> Six, Two-hour weekly group meetings Shepherd, Michigan	Fall, 2004
Gladwin Junior High School Parent Involvement Work Shops: <i>Homework for Harried Parents and New Parents in the Know</i>	1999-2005
Junior High School Staff Training <i>Responsibility Thinking Process</i> Gladwin, Michigan	Fall, 1999
Intermediate School Staff Training: <i>Conflict Resolution</i> Gladwin, Michigan	Spring, 1996
Alpena/Alcona/Montmorency Intermediate School District Day-Long Staff Training: <i>Using Adventure Therapy with Special Needs Students, K-12</i> Alpena, Michigan	Spring, 1994

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COMMUNITY & VOLUNTEER SERVICES

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Crispus Attucks/Indiana University School of Medicine Youth Mentoring Community Collaboration Project Indianapolis, Indiana	2009-2010
Indianapolis Public Schools Anti-Bully Committee <i>Anti-Bullying Curriculum Development Team, Development of School-wide 4-12 Grades Bully Survey</i>	2006-2009

Journal Article Reviewer for the Journal of Adolescent Health <i>Time Trends, Trajectories, and Demographic Predictors of Bullying: A Prospective Study in Korean Adolescents</i>	Fall, 2008
<i>Bullying Should Never Be Ignored</i> Interviewed March 14 for IU School of Social Work Website <a href="http://socialwork.iupui.edu/indexer/1700/content.htm">http://socialwork.iupui.edu/indexer/1700/content.htm</a>	Spring, 2008
WIPC 93.1 FM Radio Interview <i>Bullying: Self-Esteem of Your Child</i> Audio Archive: March 11th	Spring, 2008
Loper Elementary School Presenter/Consultant for Parents & School Staff <i>Bullying Dynamics and Intervention Options in School</i> Shelbyville, Indiana	Spring, 2008
Parent Involvement Team (PIT) Co-Leader Co-Organized and Facilitated Parent Involvement Gladwin Junior High	2001-2005
Gladwin Junior High Academic Track Coach Coached: <i>Skits and Improvisation, Female Trio, Female Soloist</i> Gladwin, Michigan	1997-2004
Crisis Response Plan for Gladwin J.H. School Building Facilitator of sub committees, Authored Sections of Plan Gladwin, Michigan	2000-2001
University of Michigan Planning and Content Advisory Committee for School Social Work Conferences Ann Arbor, Michigan	1996-1997
Big Brothers Big Sisters, County Board Member Volunteer Recruitment Committee Alpena, Michigan	1994-1995
National Association of Social Workers of Michigan <i>B.S.W., State Student Representative</i> Lansing, Michigan	1991-1992
Sexual Education Conference for Bi-County Alternative School <i>Adolescent Health and Sexuality</i> Conference Creator Marquette, Michigan	Winter, 1991

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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<i>Strengthening Social Work Pedagogy</i> Indiana Association of Social Work Educators Anderson University, Indiana	Fall, 2009
<i>Scientific Writing from the Reader's Perspective</i> Indiana School of Medicine Indianapolis, Indiana	Fall, 2009
<i>Health Care Professional Leadership Development</i> Three-Day Workshop Series Stephen Bogdewic, PhD, Associate Dean IU School of Medicine Indianapolis, Indiana	Fall, 2008
<i>Institute for Heideggerian Hermeneutical Methodologies</i> Five Day Training, Indiana School of Nursing Indianapolis, Indiana	Spring, 2008
<i>Power Up Your Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for a Web 2.0 World</i> Indiana University, Indianapolis, Indiana	Fall, 2007
<i>Adventure Therapy: Advanced Facilitators Training</i> Three Day Outdoor Training Ypsilanti, Michigan	Spring, 2004
<i>Non-Violent Crisis Intervention Training</i> Presenter: Ruth-Ann Joslin Gladwin, Michigan	1998 & 2002
<i>Responsibility Thinking Process: Discipline for Home and School</i> Presenter: Ed Ford, MSW Flint, Michigan	Winter, 2001
<i>Conflict Resolution/Peer Mediation in Schools</i> Bay City, Michigan	Winter, 1999
<i>The Defiant Child: A Clinician's Program for Parent Training</i> Presenter: Russell Barkley Mt. Pleasant, Michigan	Winter, 1998
<i>Adventures in Training</i> Four Day Training for Facilitators Working with Youth Ypsilanti, Michigan	Spring, 1996

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## RESEARCH PROJECTS

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Dissertation: *Trajectories of Parents Experiences in Discovering, Reporting, and Living With the Aftermath of Middle School Bullying: A Heideggerian, Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study.* January 2010

*Delinquent Youth's Connections to Care: A Qualitative Study* 2009-2010  
Principal Investigator: Matt Aalsma, I.U. School of Medicine  
Role: Research Assistant/Co-Author  
Responsibilities:  
Full IRB Submission, Participant Interviews, Data Analysis

*Couples Coping with Sarcoidosis: Mixed Methods* 2005-2010  
(Research in Progress)  
Principle Investigator: James G. Daley, I.U. School of Social Work  
Role: Research Assistant  
Responsibilities: Set-up SPSS and Enter Data, Coordinate and Conduct All Qualitative Interviews, Analyze Qualitative Data

Indiana University, Indianapolis, S.W. Masters Program Evaluator 2007  
Principal Investigator: David Westhuis, I.U. School of Social Work  
Role: Qualitative Analysis and Findings of MSW Students' Responses

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## CURRENT RESEARCH SUBMISSION FOR PUBLICATION

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*Parents Understanding of the Discovery, Reporting, and Aftermath of Middle School Bullying: An Interpretive Account*  
Journal of Adolescent Health  
Submitted December 2009

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## PUBLISHED WORK

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Aalsma, M., Brown, J.R. (2008). What is Bullying? *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 43, p. 101-102.

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INVITED SCIENTIFIC PRESENTATIONS

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Society of Social Work Research, 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference January 2010

Poster Presentation: *Returning to Middle School:*

*The Lived Experiences of Parents Reporting Bullying to School Officials*

San Francisco, California

The Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine April 2010

1) Young Investigator Final Five Finalist

Oral Presentation: *Parents' Understanding in the Discovery,*

*Reporting, and Aftermath of Middle School Bullying:*

*An Interpretive Account.*

2) Poster Presentation: *Anti-Bully Policy Analysis: What Health Care  
Providers Need to Know.*

Toronto, Canada