How Teachers Deal with Bullying:
Best Practices for Identifying and Dealing with Bullying Behaviors among
High School Students

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Abstract

> *Today's youth are in a social environment where being the brunt of jokes and harassment of their peers is an accepted and encouraged norm. It is not exactly clear what teachers do to deal with bullying in their classrooms. Much of the research on bullying has focused on elementary and middle school level students. Little is known about bullying at the high school level. My research investigated how teachers, administrators and guidance staff members have dealt with bullying behaviors and situations in the high school setting. The research shows that bullying behaviors are more prevalent in the school but in new behaviors that teachers are ill equipped to manage. It is clear that bullying behavior is on the increase and more needs to be done to teach the high school faculty and staff how to identify and deal with bullying behavior among students.*

Introduction

1.1 Identifying the Problem; Creating a Purpose:

Bullying has been a problem that schools and society have dealt with for a long time. The term bullying refers to the direct physical and verbal acts of hitting, kicking, teasing, or taunting another person (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2003). Bullying is also demonstrated through indirect actions like manipulating friendships or purposely excluding other children from activities (Brinson, 2005). Of late, it has become a buzz word that most everyone has become acquainted with through interest created by the media. Teachers are trying to teach students how to deal with bullying, but somehow what is being taught is not working or internalized by students. There are students in the high school setting who are suffering from being a bully or being bullied. It is the job of the teachers to make the school environment safe. How can this be achieved if the staff is not on the same page with how to deal or identify the characteristics of bullying? The question then is what needs to be done to assist teachers in educating students about and how they should view and deal with bullying in the school atmosphere?

According to Wong and Wong (2001), teachers begin every school year by explaining their classroom rules and regulations students. The rules vary from teacher to teacher and are generally broad but carry the same theme. In these rules, one can always find the generic "be respectful of your classmates", "be respectful of personal property", which are meant to help keep the classroom under control and to prevent negative behaviors. Teachers have to work extra hard in their classrooms to make the space safe for all of the students who walk through the door. Many teachers have expressed a general definition of what bullying is, but few have been able to effectively stop the behaviors in their classrooms. The goal of this research was to determine how teachers deal with bullying behaviors and what can be done to reduce the bullying behavior among students.

1.2 My Story:

Growing up I was a student who was the constant brunt of jokes and malicious pranks and rumors because I was physically different from the other girls. I was not popular, but had a select small group of friends that I participated in extra curricular school activities with. Outside of school I was involved heavily with my 4-H club, an organization from the Cornell Cooperative Extension. We did farming activities and I mainly participated in the equine activities. My body build was a constant brunt of jokes because for my age I was tall and very muscular in areas that other girls were not. There were three girls in my high school who loved to torment me emotionally by saying negative things and giving dirty looks whenever they were given a chance. My constant thought was "where are the teachers and why aren't they doing anything to help me?" I was not a student who told on the other students and did not go to my teachers, but my mother worked in the building as a teacher and heard my many stories. She

would hug me during my tearful rants about the abuse I was receiving and it was she who went to my teachers. The teachers were surprised with what they were told, but had a hard time believing something was wrong because they did not see or hear anything. The teachers would agree to talk to the students, but it was my fault they got in trouble and because they got caught, my life was to become more unbearable than before. Towards the end of high school, I started to stand up to the girls because they would leave me alone and pick on other people. Yet, I was not the angelic child either when it came to bullying, I also had a peer that I could not stand and was rude and harsh to. My behaviors assist in the claim that bullies are being bullied. I am not proud of my behavior and because I am a victim and attacker, I feel that it is my job now to find out what teachers do/ or not do to help those in this domino effect of behavior.

1.3 Forming My Inquiry:

As teachers we need to be more aware of students' feelings of safety in school and work towards easing the fears and anxieties that exist. All teachers know the classic signs of bullying but with the ease and availability of technology that the students use, how are teachers to "see" the problematic behaviors as they arise. Teachers are not prepared to have a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning if they are not properly informed about how to deal with the bullying behaviors. This problem of identifying bullying is a hand in hand learning experience between the teachers, staff and students.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Reviewing Literature that Informed My Research; an Overview:

To begin my research and formulate my inquiry into the topic and issue of bullying, I had to make a decision on how I was going to acquire the necessary data to answer my questions. Through my initial research, I created a few key questions to help me find answers as to how teacher's deal with bullying behavior among students. Creating my final question assisted me in finding research that would help find studies that would assist me in my quest for answers. My key terms were "adolescent" "bullying" and "teacher", these three terms brought up a lot of studies that needed to be sifted through, but did bring up some of the most recent studies about teachers and bullying in their classrooms. My literature inquiry helped to gain great insight to the problems of why teachers are not equipped because of the lack of research on how teachers deal with bullying behaviors and how teachers interpret the behaviors of students differently than others, so there are then mixed signals given to the students.

In a study done by Brinson (2005), she looked into the effects of how girl bullies can affect the lives of other students and how these behaviors affected the school climates. Brinson (2005) is consistent with what I found in my study. Teachers kept talking about the "mean girls" or girl bullies who are vicious and very subtle with their bullying and how they affect the school environment. Brinson (2005) states that "not only does bullying harm both its intended targets and the perpetrators; it also may affect the climate of schools and, indirectly, the ability of all students to learn to the best of their abilities" (169). As teachers it is our responsibility to create atmospheres where the students can feel safe and learn to their greatest potential. The research participants expressed that not much is being done to work against the girl bullies. There was one case, that was discussed during an interview, where nothing was working to stop the girls

from bullying and it was not until they were threatened with expulsion from extra-curricular activities, such as sports, did they finally stop. If the bullying behaviors are not being taken as seriously as they should be by educators, students are then more vulnerable.

Brinson also discusses that since there is not a lot of information about girl bullies in the educational world literature; teachers are not going to be able to not recognize the behaviors (2005). I believe that the reason why teachers are unaware about how to deal with the female bullies is because there is not a lot of research to assist the teachers with diagnosing and addressing the behaviors. Girl bullies do not always target other girls, a few research participants discussed how girls have tormented members of the opposite sex to the point where the staff had to step in. Brinson's study discusses how a boy was so severely picked on by a girl that he committed suicide (2005). Suicide always changes the school environment. The taking of a life is an unneeded event and as teachers we should, and Brinson agrees, learn more about identifying girl bullies, how to deal with them, the behaviors and how to be better advocates for the victims (2005).

One other result from my research is that teachers, staff and administrators need to collaborate and communicate. The biggest problem that was brought up by the interviewees was that teachers and administrators need to have a way of telling each other when students are in conflict because it is a small school and there is a good chance the students will see each other again. Hammel (2008) investigated how bullying tendencies in relationships where students experience visual, audio and kinesthetic input, might lead to issues when creating other relationships outside of high school. Students are able to see, hear and experience bullying through student and teacher interactions.   Hammel claims that "bullying incorporates power and intent to harm and causes physical, psychological and emotional pain" (2008, p.4). Bullying is a

power struggle for many students and can reflect negatively upon the classroom environment and students. Hammel (2008) also states that many bullies are being bullied themselves which is why they act the way they do.

For those students who are the constant brunt of jokes and pranks or harassment, school can become a nightmare, especially if the student believes that the staff is doing nothing to help (Hammel, 2008). Many bullies are popular individuals and sometimes the teachers do not pick up on the behaviors and or excuse the behaviors of the popular students (2008). By excusing these behaviors it is only encouraging the bully's actions and it shows the students who are being victimized that they are on their own to deal with the situation. The common perception amongst many students is that if they "tell" on another student for being a bully, then they will experience more bulling, which can become true. Along with increased bullying, the victim who spoke up will or might have to deal with the vocal or cyber announcement of being "un-cool" by the individual(s) performing the negative behaviors. The cyber bulling aspect was clear in the research findings and it is an area where teachers do not have much control, but the administration does. Hammel (2008) makes it clear that schools and staff need to do more to help the students feel safer in their environment. Along with making sure the students feel safe, the teachers and administration need to communicate more and trust one another to do their jobs. Showing trust and respect can help prove to the students that not all relationships will involve bulling characteristics.

One other theory that was reinforced by this study is that the students try to convert or act like those that are bullying them so that they can be left alone. Olthof and Goossens (2008) conducted a study that looked into why students might perform the bullying behaviors that are seen in schools towards other students. He specifically states the notion that some children's

desire to be accepted by bullies motivates them to behave in a similar way as those they desire to be accepted by, so that they will increase one's chances of being accepted by their tormentor"(2008, 24). The student's belief or notion of needing to belong is a behavior that many students have felt and was made perfectly clear through the interviews that these feelings do influence the students and impacts their learning. The need to belong can be psychologically damaging to the young minds of our students and its effects are disastrous because these groups of bullies are not going to accept the student they are victimizing. Olthof (2008) found many examples where students were acting a certain way to attract the perceived popular students so that the student could be accepted in the school environment. But it was determined that the individuals were not accepted by follow up research.

2.2 Definitions of Bullying by Teachers:

The teacher's definition of bullying is different, but consists of similar beliefs including that the bullying behavior is to hurt another student and to gain a sense of power out of the situation. The types of bullying behaviors will depend upon the gender of the student. Dedousis-Wallace and Shute (2009) explain that there are two types of bullying, indirect and direct, and females tend to use the indirect more often than the males who opt for the direct form. Forms of indirect bullying commonly used by girls included "exclusion from the group, rumor-mongering, malicious teasing and giving nasty looks" (Dedousis-Wallace and Shute 2009, 3). Teachers are going to intervene with direct bullying more often than the indirect form because direct is more physical and visible to teachers. "It's (indirect bullying) covert nature makes it more challenging to detect than direct bullying and teachers tend to display less sympathy for its victims"(Dedousis-Wallace and Shute 2009, p. 3). Dedousis-Wallace and Shute explain that "how

seriously teachers perceive bullying predicts their likelihood of intervening. However they (teachers) are less aware of the impact of indirect, than direct, bullying" (2003, p. 4).

To add to the indirect bullying argument Smith, Varjas, Meyers, Marshall, Ruffner, and Graybill (2010) claim that 73% of teachers perceive teasing to be a hurtful bullying behavior, which is indirect (2009, 6). Smith et all also claim that "while teachers across all school levels reported teasing as one of the most frequently occurring forms of bullying some investigations have shown that many teachers do not consider teasing as serious as other potentially harmful student interactions" (2009, 6). The claim that teasing is evident in the classroom and some of the interactions are not harmful is self-deluding and needs to be addressed in future studies.

2.3 The Difference in Perception of Intervening:

Bauman and Hurley (2005) found that only 18% of teachers intervened in bullying incidents during an observational study. This means that 82% of the time, the teacher is not paying attention or did not think they needed to intervene in the situation. Bauman and Hurley also state that "only 35% of ninth graders thought their teachers were interested in preventing bullying, and only 25% believed the administrators were concerned. Bauman and Hurley present found more than 75% of the student body believed that the administrators and teachers were concerned about the students yet that means at least 10% of the student population believe that no one is concerned about them. Bauman and Hurley state that "there is little research on teachers' perceptions of bullying. Most of the scant research points to the fact that there are discrepancies between teachers' and students' perceptions of the frequency of bullying, the location of bullying incidents, and the effectiveness of the intervention" (Bauman and Hurley 2005, p. 52). There is a

difference in perception between teachers and students as to how often teachers intervene in bullying incidents.

Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler and Wiener (2005) state that "25% of students indicated that teachers usually intervened, in contrast to 75% of teachers reporting that they usually intervened in situations where bullying behaviors are occurring"(2005, p. 719). There is a difference of perception from the two bodies in this situation which does not bode well for the relationships between teachers and students. Mishna et al also state that "teachers' explanations for their apparent lack of intervention include uncertainty about how to respond, not having witnessed the incidents, and identification of mild bullying as typical childhood behavior without serious ramifications" (2005, p. 719). Mishna et al express that there is a discrepancy between the students and teachers as to how often there is an intervention by the teachers in the bullying situations which agrees with the findings of Bauman and Hurley (2005). Some teachers believe that they interact at every chance they are given, but from the students point of view, the teacher can not possibly always step in because the teacher might be assisting some one else in the class, or might not be in the classroom at all when the behaviors occur.

2.4 Authoritarian Teachers vs. Passive Teachers:

The biggest concern is that many teachers have different schools of thought when it comes to classroom management and rules. There are passive teachers who are relaxed and seem to be the students' friend and then there are the teachers who are strict and authoritative. According to Gregory, Cornell, Fan, Shears, Shih and Huang (2010), "at the classroom level, research has shown that adolescents benefit from teachers who use an approach similar to authoritative parental guidance" (2010 p. 484). If the parents stick to their rules and consequences the student

will come to accept the boundaries and will tend to converse with the parent. Similarly if teachers show authoritative traits combined with structure and support, there is a predicted growth in achievement, especially for students experiencing the negative effects of low family income (Gregory et al, 2010, p. 484). Consistency by all staff members sharing the same educational thought will help the students succeed in the classroom and may lead to a reduction of bullying behaviors.

2.5 Questions still Unanswered:

After reviewing literature in the field of bullying, there are still a few questions unanswered. The first question is, "how often do teachers acknowledge or identify bullying behaviors in their classroom?" The next question is, "what are they (teachers) doing to deter the behaviors from occurring in their classrooms again?" The purpose of this study is to find out how teachers deal with bullying in the classroom and how they identify/define what bullying is.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Participants:

The populations targeted for my study were high school teachers from different content areas, the high school guidance staff and the high school administration. There were 11 participants in the study, all from the same high school building. This was a convenience sampling. All of the teachers and staff in the high school were invited to participate in the study through an email message. Those who agreed to participate signed a consent form before the interview. The consent form included the necessary information about what was to be gained and the purpose of the study. It clearly stated that the study was to help gather enough

information to provide a context for the effect that bullying has on the relationship between students, teachers and the school. The participants were informed that the way the data was to be collected was through interviews that would not take up much of their time. All 11 participants signed and returned the consent form.

Participation was voluntary. Written permission was obtained from the high school principal and written permission was granted by the district Superintendent. The superintendent wrote on the research proposal that she approved and signed her name. She expressed that permission for research should be granted by the high school principal. The research design had been earlier approved by the SUNY Oswego's Human Subjects Committee. The names used to refer to the participants in this report are pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

The participants for this study were six teachers, one teaching assistant, one guidance counselor, one social worker, and two principals. The teachers ranged in subject content and years of teaching experience in the school district. There was representation from the Language Other Than English, English, and Social Studies, Math, Physical Education and Art departments. All of the teachers interviewed were tenured. All participants had been in the school for more than a year and had a classroom or office that they had to themselves or shared with another staff member. The participants were nine females and two males; all were Caucasian. Three of the participants were in their 30's, four were in their 40's and four were in their 50's.

3.2 Instruments:

The instruments used to gather data for this study were interviews that averaged about twenty minutes per participant. The researcher had an interview schedule that contained nine questions. The questions that were posed asked specific questions about how the participant

dealt with bullying in the classroom, types of bullying, and the impact of bullying on the students and classroom and or school environment. Participants were also asked to give advice/strategies to help a new teacher and, anything else they wanted to share about bullying with the interviewer. The interviews were audio tapped with the consent of the participant, then uploaded to a computer and transcribed into Microsoft Word.

3.3 Interview questions:

The first question asked the participant to tell the interviewer a little bit about bullying. All participants expressed various forms of bullying behaviors and situations that affect the students in and out of school. Some participants mentioned that bullying has recently become a buzz word and is shown in the media more than in the past. The second question asked if the participant had been in a classroom when an incident of bullying has occurred. This question was easily answered with a yes or a no, and was followed by question three asking what they did with the situation. Many participants explained that they pull the students aside and talk to the bully, and then they talk to the individual being bullied. All participants agreed that it does not help the situation when the teacher addresses the situation in front of the entire class because this can worsen the situation. Some participants explained that they turn the bullying situation into a learning experience for their students by stopping their work and holding an impromptu lesson about what occurred and what could be done to make sure the situation does not happen again in the classroom.

The fourth question asked participants to define what they thought bullying was.. This particular question was difficult for the participants to answer. I found that it was difficult for the participants to answer because there are many different aspects of bullying and it is not just

one simple action or behavior associated with the word. This question led to some good information and side conversations. The fifth question addressed the issue of whether or not the participant believed that bullying was prevalent in the school building. All participants answered yes, they believed bullying was prevalent in the school. Question six asked the participant to expand and explain what they felt were the most common kinds of bullying that they have seen. The participants agreed with each other in that they felt there were few occurrences of physical bullying, but verbal and emotional bullying was prevalent. Question number seven asked participants about the impact of bullying on student learning. All participants said that it is a major problem and that bullying affects how students perceive themselves in school. The common examples given were that the student being bullied will completely shut down and not does any of the school work, or will think that they are unable to complete the work at hand.

Question number eight asked the participants if they had any strategies that could be used to prevent bullying. Many expressed that the situation has to be dealt with immediately and other participants gave ideas about how the school can stop bullying. They expressed that teachers need more hands on training in how to deal with the behaviors and that reading a book and trying to implement new ideas without help from administration and other staff members can daunting. It was agreed upon that the entire staff needs to collaborate and set up a system where students are held to the same expectations by the entire staff and by their fellow students. Question number nine was an open ended question asking if the individual had anything else that they wanted to add about bullying that had not been discussed. A few participants said no, a few just reiterated their previous thoughts and the remaining one or two participants brought up cyber bullying and that that topic needs more addressing by the school and staff. The remaining few

participants gave new ideas that they thought might help if they were implemented and supported by the entire staff.

3.4 Procedure:

After recruiting the participants for this study, times were set up for individual meetings. All 11 participants sat down with the researcher for a period of time when they were available. The researcher worked with the participants schedules and tried to get as many interviews as possible during the teacher's free periods. All of the interviews were done in a safe neutral zone in the school, such as their classroom, their office or the faculty room. The door was closed and the interview paused if a student or another teacher needed the participant or walked into the room. To ensure accuracy and reliability, all of the interviews were audio recorded and the audio files were uploaded to the interviewer's password protected laptop. After the interviews the researcher would review and transcribe the audio files into Microsoft word by typing or using speech recognition software.

4.0 Data Analysis:

The coding and identifying of themes was simple. As I looked over my written remarks from the different interviews I noticed similarities between the responses of the participants. These similarities were reinforced with the participant's verbal affirmation from the recorded interviews. Before the transcribing process, the researcher would listen to the interview and would mark or tally how many times the various topics were discussed, or mentioned. As the interviews progressed it was noticeable from the tally marks which answers were turning into themes.

5.0 Results/Findings

5.1 Common Themes:
    a) bullying behavior in school, b) impact on students learning, c) what can be done to reduce bullying

5.1.1 Bullying Behavior in School:

Definition of Bullying:

In their own words, all participants described a similar definition of bullying. They supported each other by stating that bullying was an attempt to either hurt or put down another student they felt was either different or below them. They all agreed that bullying can be both physical and verbal and the actions are intended to hurt the person being bullied. Sophia, a Spanish teacher, defined bullying as "it is tough to define, it relentless actions taken against an individual, it is not warranted it is to show your dominance over another person." According to Sophia, she believes that bullies are not faint of heart and are receiving pressure from somewhere else to be a bully and to behave the way that they do.

Types of Bullying:

All participants agreed that high schooler's are not as susceptible to use physical bullying, like the elementary students, but will use verbal bullying to accomplish their goal. The students can be brutal and verbal bullying is harder to prove versus physical. Rich B., a social studies teacher, explained that "you have to document the actions. Put it in writing the day that it occurs so that the blame can not be placed on you." He encouraged the writing up of the actions, putting it in writing, so that the teacher is then not liable in case something happens between the two students. The types of bullying ranged from different points of view but all agreed that

verbal bullying is the most common in the high school setting and generally the behaviors are exhibited mostly by girls.

Mean Girl's Syndrome:

The theme of the "mean girl's syndrome" kept being discussed by the teachers and the social worker. "Mean girls can be defined as a group of girls who dress in the latest fashions, are from the upper middle class and are on the attractive side. These girls use verbal and emotional bullying to create their dominance and position in the school. They are considered popular and therefore believe that they can get away with their behaviors. It is hard to catch these girls because they are sneaky with the ways that they bully those around them. Sophia discussed the mean girls in great detail because she has had quite a bit of experience with them. She says that

> the girls who feel they have the right to persecute their fellow female companions, friends or other students, and the way they do it are quite ruthless. It has been researched and documented that girls are especially good at it. Isolation, ruining reputations freezing somebody out, one of the top ones here at the school.

She is right in saying that the girls are sneaky because many of the other participants did not even mention the mean girls but the Social Worker told a story about a group from a previous year. She said that the bullying became so bad there were students seeking outside help to deal with the situation. To stop the bullying she said that the school was going to take away the bullies privileges to play sports, attend school functions and any other school sponsored activity. The bullying stopped after this.

Common Areas of Bullying:

Most if not all participants expressed that bullying happens more in areas that are not well supervised and are out of earshot of the staff. The common places that were discussed were

bathrooms, hallways, the cafeteria, buses and a few mentioned online. None of the participants expressed any ideas about how to fix this problem of lack of supervision. Kathy M, a guidance counselor, started off her interview expressing her ideas about where bullying occurs the most in the school setting. She states that she "sees a lot of it out in the hallway, the kids can think they can get away with it more there, the taunting of the other kids, the name calling. In the lunch room too." The hallway was a common area that was discussed by the participants where they have witnessed bullying behavior.

Cyber-Bullying:

A few teachers mentioned cyber bullying in the interviews and expressed their concern over how the students are dealing with the situation.   They explained that the students think it is ok to make a post or tweet a comment or plans about tormenting another student because there is no face to face experience. There is a computer screen in front of the child which removes the human aspect to the equation of bullying. Lucy V., a social worker, also stated "the most common kind of bullying that I see would be Facebook, electronically bullying more than anything else texting one another, bullying one another through electronic media because their face is not there, they are not looking at the person so they have a little extra boldness."

5.1.2 Impact on Learning:

Impact on Learning:

All teachers, staff and administration expressed that there is a major impact on learning when a child is being bullied. Belle B., a math teacher, discussed a student that she used to have who stopped coming to school and dropped out after a time because she was being bullied on the

bus, in the classroom and other areas by the same group of girls. The individual could not cope with the situation, which is why she could not return to school. Lucy V. explained in her interview about the impact of learning that it is

> truly an individual case basis. I think some people get so accustomed to it they think it is part of their day, other people are able to blow it off, other people can't blow it off and it upsets themselves so they can't even walk into a classroom and other people genuinely need outside services and a stint at the tutoring center to feel good about coming back here.

Communication:

The theme of communication kept popping up with the different participants. Many expressed that there is very little trust amongst the staff and that there are even occurrences of staff bullying other staff to accomplish a task or to assert power. With the charged climate that exists at the high school many individuals are not expressing their concerns. The lack of communication is not just between the administration and the staff it is also between teachers. Katie S., a physical education teacher, expressed that

> when bullying situations arise in other classrooms no one is being made aware of the problem and I don't know about confidentiality and all that stuff and who was breaking what law, but if so and so are being bullied by so and so and they are both in my class, it would be nice to have some sort of I don't know some e-mail that can go out and sort of say so and so are having an off day keep an eye on them. It would be nice.

Katie S. was not the only participant to express a need to be informed if there are occurrences of bullying between students in other classes.

How Teachers Dealt with Bullying:

Many of the participants expressed a common theme of talking to the students immediately after a bullying incident has occurred. Vanessa K., a high school principal, says she

"immediately addresses it, I pull the student aside the bully, who I perceive as the bully, usually let the victim go. Say what's going on what was that all about, that isn't how we behave in this school that is unacceptable." Markie Q, a high school principal, agreed with Vanessa K. by saying that "I have a conversation with each of the children involved, if there are two involved the bullied and the bullier and what just happened. We talk about bullying, its effects on people and then we talk about consequences of the situation." Miranda C, a art teacher, states that she "turns it into a conversation about feelings" and warns her students to stop the behavior. Rich B expressed that you should never call out a student in class. It won't help the situation. Matt C., a English teacher, expressed that he deals with the bullying in his classroom by "stepping in between the groups, during group work and will use proximity. I will step in and talk to the individual privately about keeping their eyes on their own group so to speak. I will physically be present, to help stop the situation." Most, if not all, participants said they use proximity to keep their students in check during group work because it is perceived as down time and therefore believed to be less supervised so they can sneak in the bullying behaviors because the students have the idea that they are not being as closely supervised.

Kids distance themselves:

A few of the participants expressed that many of the students do not have good social skills and seemingly do not care about anyone else or their feelings. One participant, Miranda C discussed the idea of the students not caring about anyone else in great length during her interview. She said that "the kids don't care. We as adults go 'oh my gosh' and catch ourselves and say I'm sorry if that came off the wrong way, but the kids don't apologize for anything anymore and it is truly crazy." Miranda C expressed that she does not know where the students

learn their behaviors but that some show no remorse over their actions in some situations and this disturbed her as she expressed this concept.

"I'm just kidding!":

A few teachers and an administrator mentioned that students rib on each other or poke fun at their friends and then say "I'm just kidding" which the student then believes to take away the impact of their words. Yet Markie Q talked about how she truly despises it when students say "Oh I'm just kidding". She expressed that the three simple words are a smoke screen to deal out very harsh words and by saying they are kidding, the student is then not taking ownership of their actions. Markie explains that the students say "something negative or mean to someone and when they get caught they say I'm just kidding, they know I'm kidding we just fool around like that". Sometimes it is poking fun at a friend but the situation can turn into something very malicious and the students think it can be excused as by saying "I'm just kidding." A few participants talked about the "I'm just kidding" but Markie was the most adamant and made sure to let the interviewer know that the behavior is unacceptable and to not allow it in their classroom. To go along with the beliefs of Markie, Brittany Q, a teaching assistant, expresses the same concern that students "got to keep their peers down in their relationships and will do so through verbal means".

Bullying helps the students:

Only two individuals discussed how they believe bullying helps the students learn how to deal with different people. Rich B stated that

It is common for bullying to take place. Again it is all to a different degree and each situation is unique. You got to be able to handle it. In the high school level, with some of these kids, they are going to need to know that different people are going to treat them differently and they got to figure it out themselves. They can't just run home and cry, middle school maybe, when you are 18 years old and someone is picking on you, like silly things, you gotta give it right back to them sometimes, you gotta get a little spine or you if not you're gonna get run over in life and we are trying to get these people to be life citizens and you know what it made them stronger to some capacity. Or at least I feel like it did.

Rich B wanted to make sure that it was understood that he does not believe that bullying is the best experience but it is a learning experience for individuals to understand how to deal with different kinds of people. He expressed that bullying is not going to go away and that people need to get smart in how to defend themselves. One other individual discussed in their interview how they assist students who have been bullied. Vanessa K stated that when she talks to the bullied student she "brainstorms ideas on what they can do in that situation to stand up for themselves, to protect themselves, to stand up for themselves again and hopefully that way they are invested in the solution and part of the solution."

5.1.3 What Can be Done to Reduce Bullying:

Education:

All participants agreed that the students and staff need more education on how to deal with bullying and to stop the behaviors. Belle B said that she would "love to see more education for the students, not just the students but also for the staff. Things are implemented by the school but there are very little follow through with new ideas or strategies." A few participants talked about "the locker", which is a designated locker where students can place a note about a situation that they feel the administration should know about. The participants felt that there are very little occurrences of follow through with the locker and that the students are not using it.

Initiating a Task force/Small Group:

Only two individuals discussed that task force should be instated where the students can meet with peers to discuss in confidence what is occurring in their lives. Lucy V was very adamant about instating a task force where

> to teach the kids ways to defend themselves, a way that I found to be very effective is to have the kids gang up on the bully, but do it in a very appropriate or respectful way so in other words, if you see one of your friends being bullied who is an underdog in some way, if one or two of you go and stand up to that bully and say hey cut it out kind of thing, without any physical alteration or name calling or craziness just what are you doing, this tends to take the power off of the bully.

Lucy believed that the students need to be taught how to stand up for themselves and that it is a good thing to stand up for their friends. Belle B also discussed in her interview an idea of having a small group where the student can "say anything and there was an outside social worker, so she did not have to conform to the inside rules, there was a little more protection on what could be said. Nothing was allowed to go outside. And it was amazing how that it was respected. The kids felt comfortable in the setting and these weren't their friends, but felt honored and these kids did not utter anything that was said." Belle expressed that she wished something like this small group that her children were apart of existed at the school because it might help catch the students who are falling through the cracks and help them get through high school.

6.0 Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine and identify how teachers deal with bullying behaviors and situations in the school environment. The research data was collected by interviewing high school personnel. From the research there were three common themes that all parties discussed and seemed to agree upon (a) no communication between teachers, guidance

counselors and/or the administration, (b) the discussion of "mean girls syndrome" and how girls are more apt to bully than guys, and (c) all individuals interviewed expressed that learning is impacted when a student is bullied or a student is bullying in the classroom.

6.2 Discussion:

The question that I had going into my research was "how do teachers deal with bullying in the high school setting?" Bullying is a part of many students' lives and my question is what exactly is being done to deal with the different situations. Thanks to national coverage of high school student suicides, bullying has become a buzz word and is the topic of discussion in many conversations. Talking about bullying is not enough in order to teach students how to deal with the situations or how to look out for their fellow classmates.

6.3 Strategies for Dealing with Bullying

I found many different ways teachers deal with bullying in the school environment that was positive. The majority of the teachers expressed that they turn the situation into a learning experience for the students where they discuss the situation and brainstorm ways to prevent the situation from occurring again. By doing this the student who is bullying is not embarrassed in front of the class and therefore is not to be a subject of ridicule amongst their peers. The impromptu anti-bullying lesson is the only time that the students are able to experience a form of instruction about bullying and what to do. I think that because lessons on how to deal with bulling is rare and might be the reason why students are unaware they are being bullies in some cases. The student body needs to be more instruction so that they can be more aware of their actions and how to confront bullies in a positive way. When the teachers, from the interview, are

rectifying the bullying situation always talk to the victim about what occurred. It is always "are you ok", "is there anything that you want me to do" and "do you need to go talk to someone?" The students, according to the teachers, generally just ask for the teacher to talk to the bully, which always occurred in the various situations. The bully is never singled out during class, but is spoken to when no others can hear them. From all of the different interviews, it can be stated that the staff needs more information in how to deal with the newer forms of bullying in the school setting. The teachers expressed that they participate in workshops but there is little simulation training, it is a lot of reading and being told to try different and new techniques in their classrooms. The repertoire of the teachers needs more work and an environment conducive to working towards the same goals by following and interpreting the rules the same way.

The most significant finding was the fact that there is a lack of communication between the teaching staff and administration. The high school where the research was conducted is a severely broken atmosphere and it was agreed upon by many of the interviewees that in order to fix the problems of bullying, the adults in the building need to fix their relationships first. This attitude was prevalent in many of the interviews amongst the teachers and the guidance department. I was able to interview a few members of the guidance department and the one member had little to say to me about bullying in general and kept their interview short. Whereas with the other member of the guidance department who were able to meet with me, they had much to tell me about bullying and the behaviors they deal with and even gave me sources of where I could find out more information about bullying. The last strength of my findings was that the individuals I interviewed, the majority, were more than willing to assist me outside of the interview with titles of books, workshops to look for and which key note speakers I should listen to if ever given a chance. These simple behaviors of assisting, to me, were some of the strongest

findings of my research because by reviewing and researching techniques to tell me they were learning and expanding their repertoire.

From all of my findings, I feel that the newest information discovered is that more needs to be done to help teachers deal with the girl bullies. I was not aware that there was so little information as to how to deal with these girls and their behaviors. Girls can be very judgmental and with a few small words can destroy reputations of vulnerable peers. I was shocked to hear so much from the interviewees about what the girl bullies have done and how the teachers deal with the situation. Some of the actions taken against the girls were mild or severe but there is no common ground with dealing with them determined by the school. The teachers expressed that it is relatively easy to stop male bullies, but with girl bullies it is a different experience and not so easily stopped. Another new finding that was evident in the research is that cyber bullying is on the rise and that the school staff is not equipped to deal with this form of bullying. The school has a no electronic device rule, but this is not enforced by all teachers and staff. I think that if the school showed a zero-tolerance policy towards electronic devices, there would be a decrease of bullying.

6.4 Limitations

This study was very informative and worthwhile, but there were a few limitations. First and foremost the study was short, only four weeks long, which created the problem of only having one demographic represented. If there was more time for the study to continue on more schools from all demographics would be included. For this study I was only able to interview teachers that were hand picked because of the lack of response from the teaching body. The lack of response was disheartening, and could not represent the entire mindset of the teaching body.

Those who participated were very informative and helpful, but to make the study more complete it would require having more teacher involvement.

6.5 Implications

My research implies that more educational opportunities need to occur in the high school setting in order to teach students and personnel how to deal with bullying behaviors and situations. The relationships at the high school where the research was conducted are broken and before the student body can begin to heal and learn the staff and administration need to work towards healing and learning how to trust one another. The examples that are being set forth by the adults in the building help to instill the idea that overpowering or undermining the authority of others is perfectly acceptable. The research also implies that more education in how to deal with girl bullies needs to addressed. Teachers and staff members expressed that the girls are sneaky and with the accessibility of wireless devices they are able to victimize individuals at anytime.

7.0 Recommendations for Further Research

In order for the teachers and students to be able to work in a harmonious setting, there needs to be more research done into how to get all of the teaching staff to be able to communicate. The research was only done in one high school setting for a short period of time and to see how other teachers deal with bullying it might be best to look at other rural and urban school districts over a length of time. Specific research needs to be done where the students are being observed and their opinions are being recorded. This will account for how the students think teachers deal with the various situations of bullies and also so they are represented in the data. With both sides

of the research situation covered, there can then be an opportunity to correlate the opinions and research findings and identify where the teachers and where the students need the most help to assist them with bullying. The last recommendation would be to experiment with a zero-tolerance policy where the school for a period of time does not allow any electronic devices and for all of the staff to enforce this rule by following it. This experiment should be more than four weeks long where all parties are being observed. There is a lot more research that needs to be done to assist students and educational staff with the stopping of bullying in the school atmosphere and it all starts with educating the teachers.

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Appendices

Appendix A   Letter of Consent

Appendix B   Interview Questions

Dear Sir or Madam,

    My name is Katie Gleason. As many of you know, I have been working as a substitute teacher in the district for the past year. Currently I am in my third semester as a Graduate student at SUNY Oswego. In order to complete my program of study, I will need to conduct research of an educational nature in order to complete a thesis study. The interview questions that are included in this letter are apart of the research for this thesis.

    This portion of the research focuses on how often teachers are made aware of bullying amongst the students and what they have done to work with the students and other teachers to minimize the behaviors. The purpose is to gather enough information from this interview to provide a context for the effect that bullying has on the relationship between students and teachers.

    Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate please contact me with a time that is most convenient for you so we can complete the interview. Please keep in mind that all of the information will be kept confidential and will only be used in the context of the study.

    I will provide the completed study to anyone who so requests. Please return the consent form to me using the envelope provided. If you have any questions about this study, or you would like to view a copy of my research proposal, please contact me by email at kgleason@oswego.edu. If you have any questions regarding your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Barry Friedman, Chair of the Human Subjects Committee at (315) 341-3460.

Sincerely,
Katherine Gleason

I have read the above letter and I am willing to give my consent to participate in the study. I am aware that my answers will be kept confidential and that any questions that I have will be answered by the researcher.

_____ _____ _____ _____
Participant's Signature   Date   Researcher's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Participant's Name   Researcher's Name

Date:_____   Interviewee:_____   Interviewer:_____

Tell me a little about bullying.

Have you been physically present in a classroom when an incident of bullying has taken place?

What did you do?

If not, what would you do if you were present?

Is bullying prevalent in this school?

What kinds of bullying are most common?

What do you think is the impact of bullying on student learning?

Do you know any strategies that can be used to prevent bullying?

Is there anything else you would like to add about bullying?