Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of Student Perceptions of Bullying Based on Family, School, and Media Influences

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Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of Student Perceptions of Bullying Based on Family, School, and Media Influences

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of New Orleans in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration

by

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December, 2016
Dedication

To David and my family, you will never know what your sacrifices have meant to my success. I could not have completed this journey without your willingness to help and unwavering belief in my abilities.

To my 2 girls, I promise I was thinking of you during every game or event I missed because of my need to complete this goal. Every time I showed up at your soccer match or basketball game with a book or computer, I was still rooting for you. I completed this in part for YOU, so you can realize that as women, we can be full-time mothers, hold careers, and still achieve our wildest dreams! That glass ceiling was meant to be broken girls—kick it hard!!!

And finally, to my Uncle James, who would be immensely proud of this moment. For my whole life, I admired your brilliance. I know you never doubted me, and I truly hope I’ve made you proud!
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Abstract

Though many studies have been conducted on bullying and ways to prevent it, there is still little evidence that bullying has been reduced (Bauman, 2008). Since bullying behaviors have become prevalent, incidences of negative outcomes for students who are bullies and victims have increased, hence more discussion of the topic is taking place at school, home, and in the media (Bauman, 2008; Kaiser & Raminsky, 2001; Salmon, James, & Smith, 1998). This study proposes to learn how students make sense of these multiple messages. Through an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2003), 8-10 year old students were interviewed through semi-structured interviews, in addition to student drawings and elaborations from the draw-and-write-technique (Williams, Wetton, & Moon, 1989). These methods were used to explore student bullying experiences and the process in which they make sense of the education provided to them. The study is framed through Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1994) ecological systems theory considering the multiple influences that individuals face through systems and their interactions. Data from the semi-structured interviews and the draw-and-write technique were analyzed through coding according to IPA guidelines, compared, and converged. Results showed that students confuse conflict with bullying, and receive conflicting messages about how bullying should be handled. Students are confused by what is the best reaction to a bullying situation due to conflicting messages from school and home, and the possibility of disappointment or trouble if they do not follow suggestions from one or the other. The media had minimal influence on children of this age in regards to bullying.

Keywords: anti-bullying policies, ecological systems theory, family influences, school influences, media influences, bullying
Chapter 1

Introduction to the Problem

Bullying behaviors are gaining increased attention from many avenues due to suicides, depression, and negative effects on victims and perpetrators of all ages (Bauman, 2008; Kaiser & Raminsky, 2001; Salmon, James, & Smith, 1998). A host of negative outcomes may plague students who are bullied or who bully others such as problems with acquiring knowledge in school, excessive absences, and eventually dropping out of school altogether (Nansel, Haynie, & Simmons-Morton, 2007). Unfortunately, for many bullying claims, one negative effect may lead to another. For instance, excessive absences not only lead to lack of socialization at school, but could lead to falling behind in important academic skills. When a bullied student does attend school, the traumatization or constant worry about what will happen may cause a lack of concentration, and lead to academic difficulties (Aluede, Adeleke, Omoike, & Afen-Akpaiada, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). In addition, both victims and perpetrators may demonstrate difficulties adjusting to social situations, negative self-concepts, and trouble with controlling emotions (Kim, Catalano, Haggerty, & Abbot, 2011; Orphinis & Horne, 2006).

The after effects of bullying may not only disrupt students in their school environment, but also at home and later in life. It has been suggested that negative outcomes in adulthood regarding physical and psychological issues could take place for those who experience bullying behavior (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Unfortunately, according to Kennedy, Russom, and Kevorkian (2012), 70% of students surveyed feel that they have been bullied at one point in their school career. Considering this large number of students who may be at risk for the aforementioned detrimental effects, schools in the U.S. and around the world are developing
policies and curriculum to prevent bullying behaviors. Policymakers in all 50 states have mandated that schools and districts create and implement anti-bullying initiatives (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Through these policies, schools are educating students on not only how to handle bullying behaviors when they happen, but also to prevent bullying. Though there are no specific mandates as to what must be addressed, the U.S. Department of Education did outline 11 key components of effective anti-bullying policies. These elements are suggested, but not mandated. Louisiana, for instance, only contains pieces, but not all of the effective researched elements. While these elements are chosen by each school district in each state based on population, it is unknown how effective Louisiana’s policy truly is, especially given that schools are only one of many sources in which students receive messages on bullying, and the school-based assistance does not always come from research-supported programs.

However, these policies can also be addressed in some districts through pre-packed programs such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Policy (OBPP). Through pre-packaged policies such as this, specific steps and protocols are followed by school staff to allow for trainings for all stakeholders, as well as appropriate response techniques, or a combination of effective elements from other researched programs.

Because these are all options of how to address bullying and can fulfill the expectation of the mandates, each location can choose what to do, which means there may not be consistency in many districts. This could be beneficial because they can be tailored to particular areas, or hurtful because different areas may address different aspects of bullying.
However, for children, school may not be the only place they learn about bullying. As teachers and schools are becoming more active on the issue, parents and families have their own beliefs, which in turn make their way to the child (Lee & Song, 2012; Devine, Dunham, Gadd, Gesten, Kamboukos, MacKinnon-Kewis, & Wuebke Totura, 2009).

Students are naturally educated by their culture and those around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this way, media exposure to bullying and bullying prevention is also a source of messages students receive. Media exposure experienced by students and families impacts the way a student views bullying and his or her education about it (Lee & Myungja, 2004). In addition to traditional forms of media, bullying also must be analyzed through social media, where media is not only a source of adult-authored information, but where the use of media can become a form of bullying itself (Ockerman, Kramer, & Bruno, 2014).

All in all, bullying information is now prevalent in many areas of a child’s life (Bauman, 2008). Students are surrounded by family beliefs about bullying, media exposure of violence and/or bullying through television and social media, and school-based messages. Despite positive intentions, we know very little about how students and children, as the targets of these messages, make sense of multiple and sometimes conflicting voices on the subject. The study proposed here seeks to gather students’ perceptions about bullying, in addition to understanding how they make sense of the messages received from these very powerful influences in their lives, whether from school, home, or the media.
The Problem in Context

Bullying in schools. The infamous shooting that killed 12 students and one teacher at Columbine High School in 1999 caused the first legislative push for anti-bullying policies in public schools (Stuart-Cassel, 2011). This state legislative interest has grown ever since, with all 50 states implementing anti-bullying policies. The Columbine shooting also caused a media storm of bullying related topics, as well as exposure to the violent nature of bullying and its after effects, via live video feeds and interviews with victims and bystanders. As a natural reaction to the increased exposure of bullying, discussions of bullying have increased (Bauman, 2008), and the child is left to decipher how all of these messages from various sources help him or her avoid or cope with bullying.

Bullying topics taught at schools within anti-bullying policies are created by policy makers or school educators, and mandated in many public schools. According to Bauman (2008), despite increased education in schools, anti-bullying messages have not consistently reduced bullying. Bauman (2008) believes the whole problem is not addressed, in which so many different factors are implied when a student bullies, a student is a victim, or a bystander tries to intervene.

Little research has been conducted on anti-bullying measures for students in early childhood education and some elementary grades, though there have been many instances of bullying behaviors that take place during these areas (Burkhart, Knox, & Brockmyer, 2012; Bauman, 2008). Since anti-bullying initiatives are mandated for these age groups, it seems only reasonable that research should be conducted on children of these ages in order to determine what could best work for them. Though bullying behaviors may be more common in middle school and high school grades due to the increased nature of relational bullying, which
encompasses a more indirect form of bullying such as exclusion and teasing, many research topics include these grade levels (Woods & Wolke, 2003). This study seeks to provide guidance on how bullying behaviors can be prevented in the lower grades, before students reach the difficult age of adolescence.

Though many researchers have provided guidelines for effective anti-bullying programs or curricula, not all anti-bullying policies are the same. The definitions of bullying vary from state to state, and inconsistencies exist because the U.S. does not implement specific laws to guide the creation of these policies, rather merely provide suggestions (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).

There are many definitions of the term which discuss behaviors of bullying, but rarely do they consist of the exact same terminology. For instance, Olweus (1993) claims that a behavior constitutes bullying when an individual experiences repeated exposure to negative behaviors from one or more individuals. The possible issue with this form of definition is its vague nature regarding what constitutes negative behavior. On the other hand, Smith and Sharp (1994) define bullying as deliberate, repeated harm put on an individual which results from an abuse of power.

One may question which definition is the correct or best version to use for children, or which one should be taught at all. A broad definition may entail all things related to negative behavior, but this provides a lack of clarity. A definition that is too specific may leave out particular negative behaviors, which may lead to great challenges to include every scenario. Because of this, there continues to be some confusion regarding what constitutes the
act of bullying, further underscoring the need for educators to understand the meaning students make from various sources on this topic.

**Family and bullying.** Parental and family education on bullying may be consistent or in conflict with school-based preventions. A child’s family life may have a profound effect on how the individual reacts as a victim or perpetrator of bullying since families and parents are so influential to children (McIntosh & Walker, 2008). Parental or familial views on bullying or aggression may be reflective in the personalities of the child, therefore more aggressive familial values may prove for more aggressive children (Farrington, 1993), reiterating the cycle of violence in some households, while increasing chances of bullying behaviors. Breaking the cycle of aggression that leads to bullying behavior may pose a large problem for schools, and may be extremely difficult without family support.

It is important to remember, however, that some parents may try their best to educate their child properly on the subject, but their child may still become a victim or bully. Cooper and Nickerson (2013) maintain that parents who did not experience bullying situations in childhood possessed less ability to guide their child on how to handle bullying appropriately. It also showed that parents who have internal control factors were more likely to use intervention strategies, but others who exhibit external sense of control may feel helpless and that they have no power over the bullying situation. These parents felt they could not provide appropriate means to help their child, not that they didn’t have a deep desire to. According to Ttofi and Farrington (2009), parental involvement in schools and anti-bullying efforts together have been supported as very effective in combatting bullying, but recent survey data established by school
psychologists claim that recent parental efforts have lacked in effectiveness due to improper parent training (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). In addition, Harcourt, Jasperse, and Green (2014) established that parents expressed discomfort with their level of knowledge in handling bullying situations with their children. More development in the area is needed to assist in providing parents the appropriate tools to help their children as bystanders, victims, and perpetrators. In a meta-analysis conducted by Ttofi and Farrington (2009), parental training of bullying behaviors was recognized as a key element in prevention of bullying. Clearly, parents can be helpful in combatting bullying behaviors, but without effective training, this helpful resource is not optimized. Some parents may not give the best advice in handling bullying situations, not because they want to promote aggression, but because they just don’t know the best route to take with their child. As more information is found to prevent bullying or address it appropriately, parents may be lacking the ability to help with bullying due to beliefs or lack of knowledge.

Parental views and school views may clash, but that may not just occur from a lack of support, rather lack of acceptance of a particular policy, definition, or knowledge. One person’s definition of bullying may not be accepted by the other. Determining how this can affect a child could be a major part of helping solve the problem of bullying.

**Media and bullying.** In addition to familial and school-based influences, the media is also a significant source of messages our children receive about bullying. According to the Merriam-Webster’s (2014) dictionary, the term mass media is defined as “a medium of communication (as newspaper, radio or television) that is designed to meet the mass of the people.” As of 2004, the term social media has been added as a new form of media (Merriam-
Webster, 2014). Social Media encompasses electronic communication through which online communities share information, ideas, personal messages, or other information (Merriam-Webster, 2014). Both forms of media are included in this study. One of the reasons for including social media is that cyber bullying on social media has caused heightened concern among schools and families (England, 2013; Ockerman, et al., 2014). Cyber bullying occurs when intentional and repeated harm is inflicted on others through the use of computers, cellular telephones, and other electronic devices (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Cyber bullying really becomes a problem at school when the actions taken by those using these forms of technology cause harm that disrupts the learning environment of a child, either socially or academically.

Unfortunately, cyber bullying on social media has the ability to reach many students or peers due to a plethora of social networks and computer applications, while parents may not know that anything is happening or how to address the cyber bullying if it does occur (England, 2013). More damage can be done, which could occur through anonymity, since the power of the internet could render difficulty finding out who the real culprit or bully actually is, causing even more anxiety and feelings of helplessness on the part of the victim, schools, and families (Ockerman, et al., 2014). Understanding students’ perceptions of this type of bullying can provide insight into what students are experiencing in the cyber world, allowing for educators and adults alike to address the issues at hand. In addition to bullying from peers via social media, it is also a significant source of bullying information for young people. However, as with all electronic media, the quality of the content varies significantly across sources.

Mass media outlets distributing news or television shows that discuss bullying can also be a way that children learn about bullying behaviors or how to handle them. Children and
parents may witness acts of bullying by influential characters in movies or television, and choose
to follow those behaviors. In addition, they may hear of a story on the evening news in which a
victim retaliated against a bully. Children may become anxious or emotional regarding what
they learn from media exposure, and some forms of information provided through the media
came from revenge for years of bullying, which could also cause forms of anxiety in children
who see it (Bauman, 2008; Wilson, 2008).

On the other hand, other forms of media may show solidarity in the stance against
bullying by influential anti-bullying ad campaigns. For instance, Radio Disney and Disney
Channel, along with the National Bullying Prevention Center (2014) used celebrities from
Disney Channel television shows to provide anti-bullying advice and increased discussion on the
topic to help children stop bullying. Increased bullying discussions took place online and on
television through the National Bullying Prevention Center (2014), dedicating the month of
October as National Bullying Prevention Month. The forms of bullying education through
computers and television have the ability to reach children in their daily lives, and may provide
another form of education, just as their parents or schools are trying to provide.

**Problem Statement**

Since it has been established that children are educated about bullying from different
influences, how do these children make sense of it all? For some students, what they hear about
bullying on the media and what they learn from their parents, as well as what they learn at school
may all be consistent, but for others, this information may be confusing or even conflicting,
pulling the child in different directions with not knowing how to properly handle situations that
involve bullying.
The purpose of this study is to determine the experiences of students who are facing multiple forms of education on the topic of bullying and how they are affected by this ecology of messages. Therefore, this study seeks to examine elementary school students as the intended recipients of overlapping bullying messages from schools, families and communities, as well as the media. By understanding how students make sense of these multiple sources of information, adults will be able to improve their activities and reduce instances of bullying.

Hopefully as a result of this new knowledge, not only will administrators and schools benefit from understanding how students work through multiple messages in order to handle bullying situations more effectively, but we may be able to assist policy makers in amending anti-bullying policies if necessary. Just as important, we will gain a little more understanding of what we as a society are teaching our children regarding bullying, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and if this outcome is negative in helping them cope with the life-long detriment of bullying, we may have more tools to make a change and work together to help our children.

**Research Questions**

This study will aim to determine the answers to the following research questions through the use of an interpretive phenomenological analysis:

- What are the perceptions of bullying held by elementary school students (ages 8-10)?
- How do students describe bullying messages from home, school, and the media (including social media)?
- How do students make sense of the multiple bullying messages they receive?

These three questions will guide the study to determine how students are affected by the phenomenon of being targets of multiple, often uncoordinated, communication efforts regarding bullying. The first question will elicit the overall student perceptions of bullying that 8-10 year old students hold.
The second question will be an extension of the first, determined by the experiences that the students have regarding any type of bullying and not specified in the role of bully, perpetrator, or victim. The answer to this question is important in the overall study in order for administrators to assist students with prevention or response to bullying.

Lastly, how students make sense of the knowledge provided to them may provide insight into why students behave as they do and the power of the influences around them, whether defending someone who is bullied, bullying someone else, or reacting as a victim of bullying. Knowing this can provide school leaders the knowledge of how students think, and may help in eradicating or addressing bullying behaviors which continue to be a challenge to student, parents, educators, and society.
Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework

Ecological systems theory. The theory chosen to guide data collection and analysis for this study on influential factors of children’s reactions to bullying education is ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994) maintains that children develop in a variety of ways through interactions with their environment. Within ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner describes five systems that interact with and influence an individual: a.) microsystem b.) mesosystem c.) exosystem d.) macrosystem and e) chronosystem. At the center of all these systems is the individual, who interconnects with and is influenced by all these aspects of their environment. The individual changes, grows, or remains the same based on the experiences within these systems. This theory will be used to explore the interactions between children and their multiple environments, and how the influences of these interactions influence bullying-related behaviors.

Individual. In the first tenet of this theory, the child is positioned as the center of their world. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994), the experiences of the child actually construct their reality; therefore, the environment and how the child experiences it are guides to their beliefs. Children who are at the center of multiple forms of education regarding bullying are forced to make sense of everything they are given. Education regarding bullying can be provided in different forms from family, school, media, politics, and many other aspects of our culture. According to this theory, children who are influenced by these multiple levels will begin to think according to what they are taught, and if these different forms of education contradict one another, it is important to determine how the child reacts to this potential confusion.
**Microsystem.** Students interact with those in their microsystem on a daily basis. Within a child’s microsystem are those who are a part of their daily lives and those with whom they communicate face-to-face. These are the people within their lives such as family members, school teachers, and peers. There is a direct relation between the child and others within their microsystem. Children are influenced by what they are told and behaviors modeled by these forces around them. The influence may be reciprocal, but there is usually an imbalance of power because one member of the microsystem may be more influential than the individual. For instance, a teacher within a school may be more influential than a student due to more acquired knowledge than the child while remaining in a position to educate the child. At this point in the system, the interaction is only between two people at a time, one being the child, and the other being from the microsystem. The interaction between these two participants is known as a dyad. In addition, the primary dyad is the person or image that stays with the child even when they are not together, which usually indicates that this person has the most influence over the child.

At this time, it is unknown whether the education provided by the school, parents, or other members of the microsystem are conflicting. If a conflict is present, it may be difficult for students to decipher which advice to take. For instance, family values regarding how to handle bullying or how to behave in society may be different from that of the education provided by the school. In regards to the education of bullying, parents may have one set of values, while the schools have another (Lee & Song, 2012), which make two powerful voices in a child’s life contradict. These interactions between multiple participants of the microsystem may begin to cause confusion for the child in their overall thinking of and reaction to bullying. On the other hand, family and school influences may not conflict at all, while the shared ideas from these two
powerful influences may be used to reinforce bullying education for the child. Determining the experiences of children who learn about bullying from these influences may be key to understanding where students stand in regards to bullying education.

**Mesosystem.** Within Bronfenbrenner’s mesosystem, the child not only interacts with the participants in the microsystem, but interactions ensue between its participants. Within this system, the child, who is still at the center, is influenced by the interactions of family, school, and peers. However, not only does each of these systems interact with the child, but the family, schools, and other members of the microsystem interact with each other, causing an influence from multiple forces. Through this, individuals live and experience these interactions both directly and indirectly. Children may experience the interactions between their parents and the school, their parents and their neighborhood, or peers and their school, which can ultimately shape the experiences that the child lives. For instance, the behavior of peers who bully or react to bullying situations within the microsystem may influence the decisions of adults from schools or home, therefore changing the way bullying behaviors are addressed or the type of education provided to the individual at the center. Experiencing the interactions within this system could reinforce positive or negative behaviors regarding bullying, or could help or hinder an individual in implementing the education provided by those so influential to them. It is important to remember that at this stage, the interactions between each in the microsystem will ultimately be influenced by other areas such the exosystem, which shows the reciprocal nature of this ecology. Ultimately, all interactions will affect our overall culture.

**Exosystem.** Within the exosystem exist broad entities such as political figures or media influences. The media may produce ideals shared with the general public, just as political figures do, which are representative of their specific beliefs. These may affect those within the
microsystem, and indirectly affect the beliefs of the child. The exosystem serves as a social setting for the individual, and indirectly influences the child because the interactions are not directly experienced. For example, the interactions within the mesosystem affect the individual, while these interactions also cause policy makers or media outlets to discuss these actions. Decisions are made by these broader entities of the exosystem and reach the child through policies or programs. There is a current dimension of bullying education through mandated policies in schools due to media coverage and identified detrimental effects of bullying on children (Stuart-Cassel, et al., 2011). With the influx of media coverage focusing on the violent nature of bullying and the detrimental after effects of bullying behaviors, families, schools, and policy makers are influenced to address these issues. Considering those who experience these interactions between a child’s microsystem and mesosystem, along with the child, one may question the new aspects of education the child is receiving, and the overall effects on the child from these influences.

Those in the exosystem are truly representative of and shape the overall culture because information through these entities reaches the masses. Media and political figures have the ability to persuade others to follow what they choose to share, whether the information provided is accurate or not. The idea that many can be reached to teach bullying messages and can influence an individual is important, but also may pose a problem when bullying information is fearful or opposing that of what a school or family chooses to teach a child.

Macrosystem. Within the macrosystem is the overall culture produced by the experiences and interactions among others, consisting of our belief systems and actions. All the interactions among the ecological systems are influenced by the culture, but also reciprocated by the individual. There is somewhat of a cycle that ensues when the culture impacts the
exosystem, which provides information to the participants in the mesosystem. Those systems interact and make decisions based on what is provided and influences their beliefs, and in turn, influences the individual. According to this theory, this happens for every individual, which ultimately makes up our society. The beliefs of those in that particular society make up the overall culture.

Because of this, it is pertinent to help the overall culture by helping one child at a time in deciphering their education related to bullying. What the child knows at a young age and what can be done to help one understand the possible mixed messages from all the systems will eventually affect our overall culture. It may also assist in understanding how to properly address bullying through our culture, in turn affecting policy makers, schools, home life, and ultimately, the individual.

**Chronosystem.** Within Bronfenbrenner’s final dimension of ecological systems theory is the chronosystem. This system takes influences to a new level by addressing the changes taken place over time. Not only does it consider change, but it also considers consistency in behaviors. The growing of a human being is considered through the transitions and shifts across a person’s life. These shifts are usually the result of influences that take place over a person’s lifespan. The individual may be influenced by major life events or other events; however, when these events occur, the individual may be affected later in life because of it. For example, if a child is bullied at a young age, this experience may affect how an individual behaves in adulthood, and also how this same individual interacts with other individuals. Ultimately, through this system, individuals may be influenced directly due to prior experiences of their parents. Interactions that take place during the experience and over time can ultimately influence the individual and others around them throughout their lifetime. By determining how the
different influences of the ecological systems change or influence an individual early in life may help address the long-term effects of children who are bullied or who become bullies over time. Figure 1 illustrates the influence and reciprocal effect of Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) model.

Figure 1: Ecological systems theory
Summary. Because of these interactions, handling bullying may be easier for students who have consistent messages from these influences or who may experience difficulty making sense of the different types of education they receive if the messages are mixed. This can affect the victim, perpetrator, or bystander, making it difficult to know how to defend oneself or making bullying behaviors difficult to identify. It can pose a challenge to bystanders and students who are fearful of detrimental outcomes, and it can encourage violence by bullies hearing of what others do within schools. The use of ecological systems theory aided in data collection through looking at the education of bullying from those in the microsystem, consisting of parents and schooling, which are two direct, major influences of the child. The third component of media exposure was used to compare the interactions among all three of these entities, which could affect the overall individual’s reaction to bullying. The existing literature attempts to illuminate studies regarding how students are influenced by their family, school, or media and the reciprocating effects.

Review of Literature

Increased coverage and discussion of bullying have been prevalent in students’ daily lives through media, family, and schools (Lucas, 2012). Throughout this review, studies are shared based on each individual entity of family, school, and media influences on behaviors and bullying; however, some studies will overlap to discuss the influence of two or three factors within Bronfenbrenner’s microsystem, which consists of daily encounters with individuals. The exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem will also be explored through broader entities such as the media and social media, and effects of all these influences on individuals over time.
**Family influences.** Many scholars have studied the influential power that families hold on other family members, especially children. The role that family members play influences children in their microsystem. This influence can be either purposeful or unintentional because behavior that is experienced can have a powerful impact on a child. The following studies share the importance of a family’s role in influencing an individual in many areas of their life, including temperament and possible bullying circumstances.

Coleman (1990) focused on children who shared strong maternal bonds within households. It was discussed that children who share positive relationships with their mothers are less likely to exhibit bullying behaviors than those with less positive relationships at home. These bonds create family social capital, which influences children to behave certain ways with others based on what is learned and modeled within the home. The influence of families and positive interactions among family members have an overall effect on how the individual reacts to others. Social capital derived from these nurturing effects has been shown to reduce bullying behaviors due to the ability to thrive in social situations, causing more positive interactions from supported and nurtured children.

However, individuals may be influenced both positively and negatively by family members in many aspects of their daily lives (Curtner-Smith, 2000). Students may be influenced to demonstrate bullying behaviors or be influenced as to how a student reacts as a bystander or a victim of bullying. Not only are students influenced by what is experienced on a daily basis but also by the family to which a child was born and their overall culture. According to Curtner-Smith (2000), individuals who experience motherly aggression may show aggression to others. Within this study, children who experience or witness aggression are more likely to react by aggressive means in multiple situations. Parenting was linked to elementary school bullying in
multiple cases. In the first instance, lack of empathy shown from a mother to a child actually increased occurrences of relational bullying, in which children tease one another, spread rumors or exhibit forms of exclusion. Parents who address children’s emotional needs were less likely to have children who bully, as opposed to parents who used harsher forms of discipline in their household with little sensitivity were more likely to produce students who bullied. Though the parents in the study did not teach bullying behaviors directly, the modeled behavior ultimately determined how the child behaved in society. In addition, some students who are perceived as more aggressive students are given more aggressive advice by parents, as opposed to those whose families think their children may be weak amongst peers (Mize & Petit, 1997). In these cases, the aggressive behaviors were consistent in the home as well as outside the home. Families from households described as warm and agreeable are more likely to produce less aggressive children as opposed to those who are hostile, which may result in children who are apt to bullying behaviors (Sutton, Cowen, Crean, & Wyman, 1999). Considering these influential factors and the aggressive nature of bullying behaviors and victimization, families who model these behaviors may naturally influence the children in the household to act the same way, whether that is the intention or not.

In addition to family behaviors, family beliefs have shown to contribute to bullying behaviors by parents who actually protect their children when they exhibit bullying (Cross & Barnes, 2014). Families were targeted to provide intervention for other families who either inadvertently or intentionally encourage bullying among children. Issues such as little to no child-parent communication, parental supportive bullying attitudes, and consistent bullying behaviors among family members had a huge impact on the child, making the influence of bullying more prevalent from the family. In this case, families who promote these behaviors put
the child at odds with what is being taught to eliminate bullying (Lee & Song, 2012). If a family is considered part of the student’s face-to-face interaction and high influence, this behavior can be very problematic in the overall prevention of bullying behaviors.

Family beliefs and behaviors are not the only areas that may contribute to bullying behaviors or responses. Financial implications can be made as well. A longitudinal study conducted by Christie-Mizell (2004) suggests that children of higher income families have more opportunity to receive well-being and bonding experiences to prevent aggression, yet if those resources are not used to enhance this well-being, the child is at the same disadvantage as that of a lower income child. The explanation of this encompassed many reasons. One is that the social capital provided through the wealthier families was more extensive, allowing for better investments in the child. On the other hand, children from lower income households may work more hours and provide less opportunity to provide assistance for their children to adjust to difficulties in social environments. Duncan and Brooks-Dunn’s (1997) previous study on the implications that finances can have on families and child behaviors support these findings. Though it was not fully directed toward bullying, it was discussed that parents who have stable finances and establish social connections have opportunities to spend time with their children and provide for their general welfare. The financial ability to do this also allows for behavior and health problems to be addressed by professionals, leading to children who acquire appropriate social norms, affecting a child’s overall behavior positively (Evans & Smokowski, 2015). However, no matter what the income, if the opportunity is not taken by the adult, the emotional stability of the child can be compromised.

Even though parent and family influences may address bullying behaviors or give appropriate advice to victims and bystanders, the problem of bullying still exists. In a study
conducted by Cooper and Nickerson (2013), parent retrospective views of bullying were studied. An interesting fact was that parents who remembered being bullied as a child and overcame it actually had more positive intentions when helping their children. These parents remembered how to persevere through the negative situations, and this understanding of experiences was helpful to their children. However, those who did not experience bullying situations did not have the experience, and therefore had less ability to guide their child in the right direction on how to handle it appropriately. It also showed that parents who have internal control factors were more likely to use intervention strategies, but others who exhibit external sense of control may feel helpless and that they have no power over the situation. These parents felt they could not provide appropriate means to help their child, not that they didn’t have a deep desire to. Parents may want to help in all ways possible to prevent their child from bullying or handle bullying appropriately, but their ability to help varies greatly. Open communication between teachers and parents is explicitly needed, and more qualitative studies are required to delve into what the real issues are behind student decisions as to why they react the way they do in any part of a bullying situation (Cooper & Nickerson, 2013).

Lastly, though many studies have focused on the influence that adults have on children, De Mol and Buysse (2008) discussed the reciprocal influence of both the child and the adult. An interpretive phenomenology was used to discover the influential forces of children on their parents, and dispel the traditional top down approach to influence (De Mol et al., 2008). This co-constructionist study, in which the unique abilities and beliefs of a person are identified, showed how an interrelation with individuals and culture exists. A total of 30 students from 11-15 years of age and 30 parents were studied to identify what meanings are constructed between children and parents regarding the child’s influence. The meanings between both parents and
students were studied. As a result, four overall themes arrived through the children’s perceptions of their influence on their families. It was indicated that difficulty exists in determining how children actually influence their parents, but an influence was present. Other major themes emerged in which children had influence though they had less power than the adult. Their influence is present when parents become emotional about experiences of their children, though the children did not intend to be influential at the time. Responsiveness of parents and difficulty talking about the actual contents of their influence was present among children.

The parents in the study expressed sadness when acknowledging that they did not have full influence over education of many aspects of a child’s life. They also indicated that parents learn more from their children than both may recognize, especially about social and practical learning. Though this study did not focus fully on bullying, one may wonder how the parent can help a child through a bullying situation when the parent may be learning from the child all along.

It is known that parents and families have great influence on the behaviors of a child, some directly related to how the child handles bullying situations or treats other individuals. These studies may illustrate an issue among the influences of families and may pose a problem with what is taught at home compared to other avenues of information. How students make sense of what they learn as well as how they live can be a struggle for students, especially students of influential ages when they are still learning about life around them at the ages of eight to ten years old.

**School lessons and influence on bullying.** Because of pressures to reduce bullying and the violent nature of the after effects of bullying, anti-bullying policies have implemented in all
50 states (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2015). Schools are now required to address bullying through specific policies that include, but are not limited to, student, parent and teacher training. In addition, very specific procedures are required by different states in order to ensure the appropriate documentation and consequences are provided if warranted. As a part of an individual’s microsystem, it is pertinent that schools provide the very best education and support when handling bullying issues. Several studies have illustrated the importance of these policies and their usefulness or improvements needed in school systems.

Among these policies are specific definitions that each state provides, as well as lessons that teachers are required to share with students. According to Milsom and Gallo (2006), some states are in such a hurry to create anti-bullying policies that they are done without scientific verification. For example, Louisiana’s anti-bullying policy was not studied for effectiveness. This is a major issue with such a critical topic like bullying. According to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) model, school influence is considered part of a child’s microsystem, which holds high importance to an individual. Considering this, it may be problematic if schools provide education on bullying that is not supported by research. According to Olweus (1993), successful anti-bullying measures include increased school conferences, individual work with bullies and victims, and teacher and parental training. As of now, there are no federal laws that require the use of specific research-based elements of anti-bullying policies. For instance, Louisiana’s Anti-Bullying Policy requires school lessons about bullying, but there are no federal guidelines as to what specifics should be taught to students (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2015). Without any quality criteria, one may question the effectiveness of these lessons and the overall usefulness of the policy if other influences such
as familial exposure to ideals could overpower the lessons that the schools are trying to present. Considering the powerful influence of a school setting according to Bronfenbrenner (1979), it is important the schools determine the appropriate constructs of education to address bullying issues.

According to a meta-analysis conducted by Ttofi and Farrington (2009), 53 anti-bullying programs were evaluated to find the most helpful elements in preventing and identifying bullying and harassment. The criteria for inclusion in the study were high quality programs, which included important key elements to anti-bullying initiatives. The authors dichotomized 20 elements of effective programs, which are included in Table 1. Included are a whole school anti-bullying policy, classroom rules, student training, providing student materials, classroom management techniques, co-operative groups among teachers and staff with bullies, individualized work by professionals with bullies, peer mediation, information provided to parents, increased playground supervision, discipline measures for bullying, teacher training, parent training, and virtual-reality videos.

Table 1.

20 Effective Elements of Anti-Bullying Policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element 1</th>
<th>Implement a whole school anti-bullying policy</th>
<th>Element 11</th>
<th>Materials and information for parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Element 2</td>
<td>Create and implement classroom rules to address bullying</td>
<td>Element 12</td>
<td>Increased supervision at playgrounds, commons areas, and classroom to identify bullying behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Element 3</td>
<td>School conferences/provide information to students about bullying</td>
<td>Element 13</td>
<td>Discipline for bullies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Element 4</td>
<td>Provide school with curriculum materials to address bullying</td>
<td>Element 14</td>
<td>Non-punitive approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Element 5</td>
<td>Implement appropriate classroom management strategies to address bullying</td>
<td>Element 15</td>
<td>Restorative justice approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Element 6</td>
<td>Create co-operative groups with professionals and specialists in this area</td>
<td>Element 16</td>
<td>Bully courts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Element 7</td>
<td>Individual work with bullies</td>
<td>Element 17</td>
<td>Teacher training</td>
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</table>
In comparison, as mentioned earlier, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2015) created its own list of successful elements. These elements are suggestions for inclusion in anti-bullying initiatives, but are less specific than those listed by Ttofi and Farrington. The elements are broader entities, however they do encompass the elements of previous studies. The 11 elements are included in Table 2.

Table 2.

11 Key Elements of Anti-Bullying Policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Purpose Statement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Statement of Scope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Specification of Prohibited Conduct</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Enumeration of Specific Characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Development and Implementation of LEA Policies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Components of Policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Review of Local Policies</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Communication Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Training and Prevention</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Transparency and Monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Statement of Rights</td>
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</table>

Though these components are outlined, states are not required to use these elements, making it their own choice as to what is included in policies. Louisiana, for example, included 2 dimensions and a total of 10 steps in their statewide policy, allowing school districts to tailor professional development and training to their own needs (Louisiana Believes: Reporting and Investigating Instances of Bullying, 2012).

Each district is required to train teachers for four hours of bullying education, with one hour for the student. Parental training is not included in this program, which may pose a
problem considering the literature supporting parental need for education as documented in the previous section of this study. This is in contrast to what is suggested from the 20 effective elements discussed earlier. The prevention piece of Louisiana’s policy is lacking in several aspects of effective elements to prevent and educate students through these policies. Though this is just one example of a state requirement, it is important to determine how students are influenced on what is being taught in schools. Aspects of this policy are included in Appendix A.

Though some elements used in state-wide initiatives are individual, there are other anti-bullying programs that have proven effective but are marketed as pre-packaged programs. Olweus (1993) implemented the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme (OBPP), which was shown to be very effective by Ttofi and Farrington (2009) when reviewing efficient anti-bullying programs. The main focus through OBPP is on the individual, the school, the classroom, and the community. Within the classroom, students create their own anti-bullying rules in addition to meetings with parents, teachers, and focus groups to improve the school climate. This program was considered one of the largest programs and studies on bullying to take place in the 1980’s (Bauman, 2008).

Other successful programs were shared as well. Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, Gies, Evans, et al. (2001) developed an anti-bullying model based on interactions of the bully, victim, and bystander. Through this interaction, a zero tolerance plan is implemented, behaviors are modeled by adults, self-regulation lessons are taught, and a mentoring program is implemented between the adults on campus with the students. As a result, disciplinary referrals and suspension rates at the experimental school was noted.
Though some packaged programs have been identified as successful with common elements to the Olweus program, some actually showed disappointing results. The Expect Respect program (Meraviglia, Becker, Rosenbluth, Sanchez, & Robertson, 2003) based many elements on the Olweus model by including parent and student training as well as classroom curriculum, but added trainings for school counselors to provide appropriate responsive measures for victims and perpetrators. The results at posttest showed only 19% of elementary students could distinguish bullying behaviors from other behaviors and actually showed increased reports of bullying when bullying did not exist. Meraviglia et al. (2003) suggests that the reports were due to heightened awareness from increased exposure from the program.

Lastly, school climate was discussed to determine effects on bullying behaviors of students. Teacher interactions can create a model for bullying or anti-bullying behaviors (Lucas, 2012). Though anti-bullying polices were in place, faculty members that exhibited more collegial relationships with each other maintained a more empathetic and positive environment for students. Students were less likely to show bullying behaviors than in environments where teachers were more confrontational with each other. According to Lucas (2012), teacher rhetoric and actions had an effect on students becoming bullies, even more so than the anti-bullying polices and lessons put in place. Face-to-face interactions between the child and those in his microsystem were very influential to overall bullying behaviors. To support this idea, Wang, Berry, and Swearer (2013) suggest that a negative association exists between a positive school environment and students who bully others. Adult behavior within school plays a huge role in influencing how the students behave. Teachers who exhibit supportive relationships among students as well as peers are more likely to produce empathetic students, and a less conducive environment to bullying. The education provided by these more empathetic teachers are more
likely to reach successful anti-bullying initiatives as opposed to those who model more aggressive and unsupportive behaviors.

All in all, an individual can be influenced by the education received from school in multiple ways. This can be done either by sharing lessons on bullying behaviors or infusing beliefs into the overall climate of the school. Since a school is within an individual’s microsystem, what is gained from those in the school environment will affect the individual’s behavior, in addition to how one reacts to bullying. Deciphering how influential a school can be in comparison to other influential factors in a child’s life can be beneficial in addressing the problem of bullying.

**Media influences on bullying.** When using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, media was described as part of an individual’s exosystem, which does not directly impact an individual, but impacts those in an individual’s microsystem. This causes an indirect impact on the person in the center. The term media is not specified, however, originally, it was considered just part of a mass media system. This was developed before social media became prevalent to society. Regardless, both are considered an influential piece in the life of an individual. According to this theory, because the media is not a form of face-to-face communication, it is thought to be less influential than parents or school personnel. After learning the perspectives of students who experience increased media exposure through social media, newscasts, anti-bullying ads, and many other forms of media on a daily basis, one may question the current power of the media regarding influential factors of bullying. The following studies reiterate the media’s importance in influencing an individual and the potential impact both mass media and social media can have on a child.
According to Brown and Merin (2009), adolescents experience daily exposure to media outlets, not only on television but also through the use of the Internet and social media. The violence that is being produced by these outlets may have a detrimental overall effect on children. To support this claim, Lee and Myungja (2004) suggest that influences of anger and difficult friendships were present due to media influences of violence and bullying, which crossed over from the home to school. It was indicated that the violence portrayed by the media had an overall effect of more bullying at school due to the exposure of aggressive behaviors and children enacting what they watch or interact with from home.

In another instance of media influence, Wilson (2008) maintains that children who are exposed to media presentations of aggressive behavior and bullying may feel increased anxiety and fear. Media in the form of television and radio can be very powerful to a child, and when the media exposes a child to violent nature of events, it can be fearful. For example, television programs that contain bullying, as well as show retaliation to bullying can be fearful for children. Exposure to programs of violent nature may also increase aggression in children, possibly leading to more bullying situations (Wilson, 2008).

News media outlets that expose suicides and effects of retaliation can cause heightened concern among not only children but also parents, making them wonder if these issues can happen to their children (Ockerman et al., 2014). Multiple studies have shown that violence and media do influence individuals. According to McIntosh and Walker (2008), over 3500 studies have been conducted on the influence of media violence on actual violent behaviors, and only 18 of those studies did not show that an influence was present. These media programs include not only fictional programs but also real-life situations such as newscasts and
documentaries. Though a determination of the extent of influence was not shown, the existence of the influence was prevalent. However, the data of this study suggests contradictory findings.

Recently, media has expanded to more than just television. The increased use of computers and cellular phones can have a profound influence on children and bullying, especially as social media is now a very prevalent fixture in the life of adolescents. An estimated 95% of American adolescents are online in some form (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2007; Lanie, 2015). Despite the digital divide, in which several implications can determine unequal access of the internet, students still manage to find a way to get online (Ahn, 2011). Approximately 75% of adolescents use some type of mobile device, such as cellular phones, tablets, or portable computers that have the capability to send and receive text messages, use applications, access the internet or take photographs with the capability to send them (Rogers, Taylor, Cunning, Jones, & Taylor, 2006). Included in these capabilities are social media outlets that may influence children in many situations.

One way that social media may provide for enhanced bullying or a lack of ability to assist in situations is through cyber bullying. Because of advances in technology which enable personal communications, increased temptation to bully is available even for students who would not normally behave in such a manner face-to-face (Holland, 2015). According to Holland (2015), if access is restricted through parents, students may be able to access devices from peers or others who do not have restrictions, making the ability to reach others much easier. In a study conducted by Underwood and Rosen (2011), cyber bullying was more likely to occur regardless of size and ability due to a perpetrator’s ability to remain anonymous. In this study, the amount of gender related online bullying was mixed. It was determined that media capabilities can
enhance bullying because perpetrators feel they are less likely to get caught in the process. The ability to spread rumors and produce false information is much easier online, can reach many more recipients, and is much more difficult to track its origin. Though boys have digital footprints that consist of online video gaming and posting videos, and girls frequently use instant messaging (Lenhart et al., 2007), the amount of exposure is profound to each gender. Implications were made that interventions should be gender specific in order to truly address what each gender experiences online and how to safeguard victims from cyber bullying. Essentially, cyber bullying can be easy to accomplish, which makes it much harder to identify and address.

Though cyber bullying is increasing, face-to-face bullying still occurs and is a major problem in schools. Nowland (2015) suggests that cyber bullying is not nearly as detrimental as face-to-face bullying. Student perceptions of the two types of bullying showed that cyber bullying was easier to respond to as a victim, by way of being able to block or delete the message, as opposed to being scared of face-to-face threats of physical violence. Real communication, according to some students, hurts more than a message sent digitally. However, other students felt that cyber bullying was worse because more people can witness the humiliation of it, and bullies can garner more support from people who may not necessarily bully face-to-face. Victims also expressed difficulty with dealing with cyber bullying because perpetrators have the ability to hide behind computerized devices.

Because of the influx of media usage in children’s lives, an alternate dimension has been proposed to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory to account for the inundated exposure of media through computerized access. Johnson and Puplampu (2015) developed the techno-
subsystem, an added component to Bronfenbrenner’s original microsystem to illustrate the influence of daily face-to-device encounters. It is implied that the influence of media is so strong in the lives of children today, interactions among children and adults are now taking place through technological devices. This addition to Bronfenbrenner’s theory highlights how the use of technology and media relations are influencing the day to day lives of children in both negative and positive ways. Children have shown enhanced abilities with visual intelligence and monitoring visual stimuli with increased gaming and computer use; however, positive social aspects have decreased through over arousal, increased aggression, and less sensitivity to others (Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley, 2007). The proposed component of the microsystem encourages exploration of the influences of media on individuals and their ability to grow and learn through the technology and experiences behind the usages of said devices.

Media usage, in addition to bullying in school, may make it even more difficult to focus on school related learning and social development. It is important to determine how these media influences combined with those of school and family assist in understanding the complications that students face when learning about and reacting to bullying. The literature supports that media influences can affect the behavior of an individual, as well as provide an outlet for bullying to occur due to cyber bullying. The influence does not just determine how students think, but it gives them an opportunity to engage in bullying behaviors. More studies are needed to determine how this new form of influence can affect a student over traditional direct influences such as those in the microsystem.

**School and family influences combined.** Though much attention has been given to relationships between bullies and victims, little examines how bullying is affected by school and
home relations (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010). However, this concept is very important since individuals from both school and home are considered so influential to a child through the microsystem. The following studies illustrate the effects of the influences of both school and home, how they are similar, and how potential differences may have an effect on an individual.

Students from 22 Australian schools discussed experiences in which influences of families and schools were identified. Interestingly, both sides of a bullying situation were examined, in which both victims and bullies were studied. Though students who held fewer peer relationships were affected as both the bully and the victim, students with strong relationships to teachers actually were less likely to bully and less likely to become a victim. The influence of the teacher in the school setting was quite powerful. The reported stress from home experiences in the lives of students’ affected students negatively in that more students became bullies or exhibited bullying behaviors.

In a similar study, influential factors for both bullies and victims exist. For instance, Devine et al., (2009) determined that students are influenced by families and home lives that are well monitored and show less aggression among members, making students less likely to be a victim or a bully. Schools that exhibited teacher bonding and better monitoring also showed a decrease in bullying behaviors. The influence of supportiveness from both school and home helped students exhibit more peaceful behaviors; however, students who grew up in more aggressive households were less likely to bully in schools that contained more adult monitoring, indicating that adult presence was key in preventing bullying behaviors even when home lives were more conducive to bullying.

Dynamic relationships between family, children, and their interrelationships are common to determine overall behavior, but Cross and Barnes (2014) determined a way to make both
influences work together for the betterment of intervention programs. School programs cannot be successful if these efforts conflict with parental views or lack of parental support (Cross & Barnes, 2014). Their study was designed to determine parental attitudes toward bullying and their beliefs on how to handle it, as well as provide management suggestions to handle bullying at home. A plethora of parental attitudes emerged ranging from parental support of bullying behaviors to the beliefs of ineffective management. Determining the normative standards that are present in households may support bullying behaviors when it is not noticed or realized by the family. Coupling parental intervention with a school based program to help both the home situation and the school by means of a whole school program was effective in reducing bullying. It also assisted parents as well as teachers in handling the effects of bullying behaviors and how to handle students appropriately.

Lastly, Lee and Song (2012) conducted a study through influences and Ecological Systems Theory on the functions of parental involvement along with a school climate of bullying behaviors. Through this, focus was put on bridging the gap between the school and parents in addressing bullying, and the ability for school climate to be influenced by parents and students. The findings indicated that individual character traits were most influential on whether a student will exhibit bullying behaviors, parental involvement was directly related to the overall climate of the school in both positive and negative ways, and schools with a positive school climate among faculty, students, and parents were less likely to have issues with bullying on the premises. One area from this study that was contradictory to other studies was that negative experiences in the home did not influence bullying behaviors at school. Instead, the character of the individual held the most indication whether a child would bully, and the influence of negativity or positive intentions from families were not as powerful as the individual himself.
**School and media influences combined.** Because social media has increased in usage over the last several years, and media is considered a powerful influence in an individual’s exosystem, the possibility of some type of media affecting what is learned in school or vice versa is important to consider. The subsequent studies address a media and school combined influence on individuals, which have shown an overall effect on bullying.

Using statistical analysis of MANOVA, Ockerman et al., (2014) determined the frequency of cyber bullying and how it is related to schoolyard bullying. Using a sample of 352 fifth through eighth grade students, it was determined that the most common form of cyber bullying occurred through text message with teasing, name calling, and misuse of cellular phones by taking and sending pictures or uploading videos to harm others. Through the study, traditional bullying such as kicking and hitting have become less prevalent and replaced with more verbal teasing. Increasingly, cyber bullying is slowly becoming a more common form and is frequently crossing over from home to the school grounds, in which the effects of cyber bullying and school bullying are now reciprocal. Because of this, it is suggested that schools begin to mirror their anti-bullying policies to address cyber related issues, as opposed to just more overt forms of bullying. Administrators are deemed responsible for deciphering bullying through physical, as well as cyber means. They are expected to address issues that may be difficult because most of the cyber relationships occur off of school grounds, but have an overall effect on students during the school day.

Similarly, a recent study of over 3500 students surveyed by Randa (2015) suggests students who are cyber bullied have an extreme amount of fear that bullying online will overlap onto school. The study showed that minority populations held the most fear regarding cyber
bullying, especially due to the presence of gangs at school. The two systems of media and personal interactions were interrelated and could not be separated, hence a reciprocal influence was present.

The influence of social media has shown to impact a school community due to the relationships that occur over the device, but make its way back to the school. The ability to remain anonymous on computerized devices enhances one’s ability to engage in behaviors that may not be conducted in person. Also, these devices reach such a large amount of people at one time that information can spread much quicker and almost serve as a vehicle for bullying behaviors to spread. As influences, it is important to address the effects that media has with school in order to cover all areas that students are exposed with bullying.

**Family, school, and media influences.** A mixture of family, media, and school influences cause even more influential behaviors for an individual to sort through. These three factors are all influential to an individual and, combined, may either enhance one’s education toward bullying or cause more of a hardship in dealing with the situation. These studies outline a combination of the different sources of education and the after effects of these influences.

Barboza, Schiamberg, Oehmke, Krzeniewski, Post, and Hereaux (2009) shared influences from multiple sources to determine the most influential risk factors for students who eventually become bullies. Using an ecological perspective, adolescent students showed that frequent television watching had a large impact on students becoming bullies. Other risk factors were schools with lack of teacher support and parents who did not have high expectations of student performance in school. Interestingly, some students with former experiences of being bullied actually became a bully later in adolescence. Implications are made that issues in and out of
one’s microsystem influence bullies; however, focus was just placed on the individual identified as the bully. One may inquire how these factors that influence a bully may also influence a victim, considering the multitude of media coverage on bullying as well as the family and school within an influential microsystem.

Lastly, Englander (2013) introduced the bullying enigma in which multiple bullying messages are present in the daily lives of students. Educators expect students not to tattle, yet encourage them to report behavior. Parents expect their children to defend themselves, but schools issue consequences for being violent or hitting back. Adults encourage children to learn how to handle situations of bullying on their own, but they attempt to intervene in the process. The messages Englander suggests can be very confusing to children. It was determined that understanding the development of children and how they are bullying, as well as suggestions for practitioners to address the issues and confusion are needed to address the problem. It was also concluded that cyber bullying does exasperate schoolyard bullying by events and messages online becoming a face-to-face conflict. Media bullying increases anxiety and helplessness among victims because of the difficulties with sensationalism of bullying, especially by news outlets. The reality, according to Englander (2013), is that bullying is no longer so overt, but more discrete, causing adults difficulty in knowing what to look for. Suggestions for educators and parents are to consider the power of the messengers and the message. It is important to understand that when students are encouraged to “tell,” it does not eradicate them from the responsibility of trying to address the situation on their own. It is also important not to over use the word bully since it hinders a person’s ability to recognize behaviors and creates more victims. Though Englander’s study addressed the multiple messages students face, as well as misconceptions that children face about reporting bullying to adults, she indicated an increase in
anxiety produced by the media. This study disputes that suggestion since the media did not appear to have much of an influence on children, especially as opposed to school and parental influence. Electronic media, though discussed more frequently, was used more as a social outlet than as a place where students learned about bullying or were faced with bullying. Consequently, one student shared an experience with cyber bullying and this experience was no more detrimental than face-to-face bullying.

In closing, the combination of those three factors have shown to have different effects on individuals, which a child must sort through in order to make their own decisions. This study will explore the experiences of elementary students to determine how they are affected by these influences.

**Qualitative studies on perceptions of bullying from school, home, and child.** In light of a current study to garner reactions of bullying through influences, one qualitative study used grounded theory methodology to determine student perceptions of actions. According to Purcell (2012), students make determinations of what bullying is as well as how to handle it based on their perceptions.

Purcell (2012) maintains there are many different definitions of the term “bully,” and there are also many perceptions of how students are reacting to it. To eight elementary students, eight parents, and two teachers in the study, bullying is basically relational to a situation and the child’s actual perception of it. Gender differences were illustrated through a boy’s perception of bullying as “you push someone, you could hit them back” (pp.277), and a girl’s perception is that a bully is someone who is “being mean or bossy” (pp. 277). The children explained that adults did not believe them when they reported bullying, but teachers maintain they tried to
empower the victim to handle their own situations as opposed to the adult handling the situation for them. Parents discussed the need to work closely with the school environment to discuss bullying and offer trainings to address not only academics, but also social issues to help their child.

Similarly, Mishna (2004) suggested that students perceived it difficult to determine a true bullying instance. They felt that it was more comfortable to tell a peer about bullying they experience than to tell a teacher, whereas the teachers felt that it was difficult to determine if bullying situations were real or the victim was truly a victim or if it was instigated.

To possibly assist teachers, one study was conducted on Japanese middle schools to provide teacher support to address problems of *Ijime*, the Japanese form of bullying behaviors. According to Akiba, Shimizu, and Zhuang (2010), teachers are required to address bullying behaviors through their homeroom settings, in discussion circles in order to promote bonding between the teachers, students, and each other. If the teacher feels the problem is too difficult to handle in a homeroom setting, the teacher brings it to the grade level and the counselor, and they are to have meetings to discuss strategies to address the problem. This concept may assist teachers and schools to address bullying as a group effort.

**Summary.** Though several aspects of a child’s daily influences were addressed, there is still more to learn about how students make sense of the different forms of information gathered about bullying. It is known that families, schools, and the media have influences on the child regarding bullying, but at what point does the child have difficulties handling situations either as a bully, victim, or bystander that could be affected by one or all of these influences. Families have shown to determine behaviors of a child through aggressive or non-aggressive behaviors,
schools can influence through scientifically verified programs or a mix of anti-bullying lessons, and media may influence by using television programs in addition to the daily interaction of children with computerized devices. In addition, multiple studies have shown that some of these influences overlap where one influence garners more power than the other in the mind of a child.

Future studies may shed light on how students make sense of the information given to them on bullying in order to better educate policy makers, educators, and students. Major implications from many studies are that young children understand the concept of bullying, but they also reach out to adults for help. It was stated that there is importance in responding in consistent ways to help younger children understand how to handle situations as they get older. Recognition on the complexity of young relationships is important to stop bullying before it fully begins or at least to assist children in working through conflict.

Hopefully, through this study, more answers will be given to determine how these influences mixed with others help or hinder a child’s thinking. It is clear that parental involvement in cooperation with schools can help eradicate bullying, but with a third dimension of media, children have received many messages that they must decipher in order to address their problems.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Rationale for Qualitative Research

In this study, the sense-making abilities of children were explored; hence the best option of research is qualitative. According to Rudestam and Newton (2007), studies that aim to understand perspectives and focus on experiences from the participant’s point of view are qualitative inquiries. In this case, the student’s voice was elicited while their perspective and understanding were placed in the forefront. Parents, lawmakers, and educators have a perspective, while children take these and form their own derivative perspective. This study made sense of the perspectives of children from different influences that affect them in regards to bullying situations. When doing this, multiple perspectives can be considered and beneficial information can be brought to schools and districts to help address bullying. Qualitative inquiry is associated with constructivist views, and meaning is created by a social exchange of interactions and values (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Through the theoretical frame ecological systems theory, interactions within each system that the individual encounters may affect him or her, so a qualitative study assisted the researcher in understanding the meaning derived through these hierarchical interactions. Allowing the children to share their point of view, listening to their sense-making process, and exploring the interactions among various sources determined how these children make sense and meaning of the multitude of information that may or may not influence their thoughts and actions regarding bullying.
Rationale for Methodology

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), individuals experience a dyadic relation, which encompasses the relationship between two people where one may be more influential than the other. In turn, this enhances development within an individual and the opportunity to learn. These experiences and potential development may be interrupted by those from the outside world such as other members of the microsystem, or members of other systems in ecological systems theory. Because the individual faces experiences from these influences that may affect his or her development, the methodology chosen for this study, which focuses on student perceptions and sense making, is Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). According to Smith and Osborn (2003), a researcher may make sense of the social and personal world around him through an IPA. Because meaning can arise within these experiences, studies of phenomenon can garner beneficial results to many arenas that help individuals, such as in education and psychology (van Manen, 2014). Within some children’s educational world, bullying does exist. The phenomenon of bullying and the increased exposure to bullying education continues to grow; however, there is little evidence of a decrease in bullying behaviors (Bauman, 2008). More information from the children who actually experience this phenomenon will serve to expose the perceptions of students who have received information from schools, parents, and the media regarding bullying, and how they make sense of all three.
Methods

Participants

Following Smith and Osborn’s (2003) interpretive phenomenology methods, participants of this study consist of 10 children between 8-10 years old. Many studies have been conducted on students 11 years of age and older because bullying has been identified as a major problem in middle school grades, especially due to insecurities and confidence issues of children who are approaching their teenage years (Ttofi & Farrington, 2009). However, bullying is not only present in middle school grades. In fact, children in elementary school do face bullying and may experience lifelong negative effects. Niemela, Brunstein-Klomek, Sillanmaki, Hellenius, Piha, Kumpulainen, and Sourander (2009) suggest that children as young as the age of eight may face detrimental effects due to childhood bullying, and as they grow older, tend to exhibit addictive behaviors. Milsom and Gallo (2006) also suggest that little research is conducted on effective ways to prevent bullying in ages under 11. Determining the experiences of students at a young age may help educators address bullying issues early on to prevent negative effects later in life, as well as the difficulty faced “in the moment” for students who are bullied.

Participants were chosen from 14 public elementary schools within the researcher’s current school district. In order to stay within the Louisiana law protecting student identity, the school district utilized their school climate specialist to distribute an elementary bullying and harassment survey created by the researcher and approved by the district. The survey (see appendix D) consisted of age appropriate questions in the form of a checklist to determine victimization and harassment experienced in schools. The checklist started out by addressing if a student felt like they have been bullied or have experienced some type of bullying. It then
moved to address different ways that students were educated on bullying, and lastly, if they have ever been accused of bullying others.

To begin, the specialist distributed the survey to all 14 elementary schools within the parish that included grades third through fifth grade. These grades were chosen because the largest number of 8-10 year old students were available. Once the survey was given to all schools, homeroom teachers shared it with their students. Students were asked to fill out as much demographic information as possible to ensure a variety of students were chosen in the overall project. At the bottom of the survey was a student interest section that the teachers read aloud. It asked the students if they would be interested in possibly participating in a further study about their bullying experiences. It was in the form of a yes or no question in which students could easily document whether they would feel comfortable with the possibility of further investigation into their experiences. Once the surveys were completed, each school returned them to the researcher. The researcher sorted through the surveys of those who expressed interest in the project. From those, an assortment of six, 8 year old, 9 year old, and 10 year old girls, and six, 8 year old, 9 year old, and 10 year old boys were chosen based on their indication of some sort of bullying experience, preferably including some type of influence from either home, school, or media. In addition, a proportionate number of students were chosen according to race to ensure a variety of participants. Once a variety of the 36 students were chosen from the school surveys, the administrators of each school with chosen students contacted parents through the parish database and verbally asked if the student would be allowed to participate in the study. When verbal consent was given, the researcher sent home a parent permission letter. The final list was chosen from the 36 that the parents agreed to allow to participate. This number was narrowed down to 10 students, and consisted of 6 white students, 2
black students, 1 Hispanic, and 1 American Indian, which were proportionate to the most
updated elementary school demographics of the district (i.e., 3-4 from each age, considering
male/female population and racial makeup proportionate of the district). The flow chart titled
Recruitment Flow Chart outlined the selection process.

Since students felt more comfortable in their school environment due to familiarity and
accessibility to the counselor, the researcher asked and was granted permission from each
administrator to conduct the interview on the respective school campuses.

Figure 2. Recruitment Flow Chart
Description of area schools.

A total of ten, 8-10 year old students were chosen from one rural parish in South Louisiana. Since the school district encompasses a north, central, and south region, students were chosen from each area. A total of five schools were represented when the participants were chosen. The first two students chosen were from South Landing Elementary School, located in the southern part of the parish. This school is a pre-K through fifth grade school with demographics of approximately 50% male to female ratio, 58% White population, 12% African American, 17% Hispanic, 4% American Indian, and 4% Asian. This school services a rural community located along the bayou of the parish.

The next school chosen for the study was Blue Bayou Elementary, which is located in the central area of the parish. This school is located on the border of two South Louisiana school districts and encompasses a very transient community. The demographics are 50% male to female ratio, as well as 72% White population, 8% African American, 11% Hispanic, 7% American Indian, and 1% Asian. This school is also the largest elementary school, and only services Pk- forth grade due to overpopulation at one time. Their fifth grade students have been moved to their area middle school, so they were not included in this study since the environment they are in is not an elementary setting.

The other central area school chosen for the study was Raceway Upper Elementary, which holds third through fifth grades. This community area school consists of an approximate 50% male to female ratio, with 37% White, 53% African American, 5% Hispanic, .3% Asian, and 3% American Indian population.
The last two schools chosen were from the northern area of the district. These schools have similar demographics and are both servicing high poverty communities. Woodland Elementary School encompasses pre-K through Fifth grades and is currently part of a school choice system due to consistent declining test scores. The demographics of the school consist of a 54% male population to 46% female. The racial make-up of the school is 31% white, 61% black, 4% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 1% American Indian.

South Woodland Elementary was the final school chosen for the study, with demographics consisting of 29% white, 62% black, 6% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 1% American Indian. This school also holds Pre-K through Fifth grade and services a large community in the same city as Woodland Elementary.

In order to ensure a wide representation of the district demographics, the researcher chose 5 girls and 5 boys, which is representative of its boy to girl ratio. A total of 6 white students, 2 black students, 1 Hispanic, and 1 American Indian student were used as participants in the study in order to remain proportionate to the variety of races represented in the district. The following table provides a description of the participants used for this study.
Table 3.

Participant descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiana</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kay</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayne</td>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livie</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hans</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hal</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liam</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

According to Smith and Osborn (2003), semi-structured interviews are used to build rapport with participants and to garner trust through emotional topics. Considering the emotional topic of bullying, semi-structured interviews were used in order to allow students to guide the discussion about their experiences. Time limits were taken into consideration for the children, though none of the students had any negative issues occur during the interview process nor the draw and write session. Questions consisted of one grand tour question to determine the student’s understanding of bullying, and then specifically addressed experiences of school,
home, and media exposure to bullying information. The researcher also questioned the participant on how he/she made sense of these three forms of information. Flexibility in questioning was incorporated in order to gather a true account of events from each participant. Semi-structured interviews allowed for topics to be initiated by the researcher, but new topics were considered and explored because each student had different experiences and led the questions based on information provided. These tangents became very useful to the overall study. Audio recordings took place in order to assist in transcript writing after the interview.

Students also created drawings to depict their feelings in order to enhance the data collection process. The use of drawings was helpful in gathering data that may be emotional or sensitive in nature, especially in children (Guest, Namey and Mitchell, 2013; Sewell, 2011). The draw and write technique (Williams, Wetton, & Moon, 1989) was initially developed for use with researching children and is used in qualitative research to dissolve barriers between a participant and the researcher (Pridemore & Bendelow, 1995; Onyango-Oumal, Aagard-Hansen, & Jensen, 2004). The use of drawings in addition to semi-structured interviews elicited more information from children and enhanced the interview answers. This allowed the students to begin thinking about bullying situations, and even though most of the students drew a situation that was fictional, it did enhance thinking about their perception of bullying. It provided an immediate representation of how they think. This technique was also used within the current study since drawings may assist in a participant’s sense-making abilities, which is ultimately investigated through an IPA.

According to Williams, Wetton, and Moon (1989), participants were asked to draw a picture according to an inquiry given by the researcher. Participants were then asked to explain their drawings or provide elaboration either by writing answers or answering questions
verbally. Through this study, the technique was used before the official semi-structured interview portion for convenience of the participants. The participants were asked to draw their experiences of a bullying situation, in addition to identifying who they are in comparison to the other people in the drawing. It is important to determine the particular child in study so the researcher can compare his actions to others in the picture. Once this section was completed, the researcher asked the participants to elaborate on the picture, addressing what they learned and where they learned it. As the draw and write interview ensued, the researcher reverted back to the picture for reference, especially regarding the child's actions according to their influences. According to Mair and Kierans (2007), this technique should be used with other types of empirical analysis, such as an interview, so patterns of text can be analyzed. Therefore, it was used in conjunction with the semi-structured interviews.

The timeline for data collection began once approval was given through the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Ideally, the data collection process began in April 2016, when the district survey for participation was distributed. Once all participants were chosen and consent was received, the interview process began and concluded in May 2016.

**Experience in implementing the draw-and-write technique as data collection**

This unique method of data collection was very interesting to use with children and is worth sharing for future researchers to witness its overall value as a collection method. When the interview began and the researcher explained that the students would draw a picture, many of the students hesitated and explained that they did not feel that their drawing would be satisfactory or that they “could not draw well.” It was important for the researcher to comfort the participants and explain that they would not be judged by the drawings, even encouraging the use
of stick figures to prove that the quality of what they were illustrating wasn’t in how talented they were, but of the inclusion of an experience in the picture.

Once the students finished the picture, the researcher asked if the situation was real or fictional. At this point, most students explained that the picture was indeed fictional and was quite hesitant to admit that they had experienced a bullying situation. Many students shared that they did not experience bullying when asked at this point in the interview, but it is interesting to note that later, in the semi-structured interview portion, students did admit to experiencing bullying, contrary to what they had said at the beginning during the drawing section. This was very indicative of the value of this section.

One may ask, “How could this show value when the students lied about their experiences?” The experience during the draw and write section was important, but it was used to determine how much students knew about bullying at this point, and their feelings and influences regarding it. It was used to determine what students had learned about bullying and how they had applied what they learned; therefore, the accuracy of the experience in the bullying situation at this point did not affect the overall study. In addition, it allowed the student to relax and know that at that point, no matter what the student said about bullying, he or she would not be judged by the researcher. This in turn broke the ice, and later, when the experience of bullying really mattered, the students did come through and share that they had in fact experienced bullying in some capacity and felt confident enough to share that information. In other words, the drawing activity was used as an introduction and a way to garner information, while gaining the trust of the child at the same time. Once they began drawing, they seemed to enjoy the process, and having a picture to refer back to allowed the students to really discuss what they knew about bullying. The illustration was also used to identify student actions of
“what they would do” or “what they have already done” when reacting to bullying, and in this, the researcher was able to have an artifact of the activity which was created by the student and used for future reference.

Analysis

Following Smith and Osborn’s (2003) suggestions on analysis of interpretive phenomenology, both the draw and write and semi-structured interviews were transcribed, coded, and emergent themes were noted. Audio recordings were used for both sets of the interview process. The researcher then re-played the recording and transcribed each section verbatim. The picture created by the student was also kept with the draw and write interview transcript. Once all the interviews with both sets were transcribed for each participant, the researcher read through both parts. On the first reading, codes were noted in the left margins of the transcripts. The transcripts were read again for familiarity. On the third reading, themes were noted on the draw and write transcript and the semi-structured interview transcript for each participant. These themes were created from combining similar codes on each participant’s set of transcripts. Once themes were determined, they were clustered among each participant. This process continued for each participant until all transcripts were complete. Themes were then compared and combined for similarity. Once all themes were narrowed down for each participant, they were compared to others in the category of either draw and write or semi-structured interview. The major emergent themes for each section are included in table 4.
Table 4.

Draw and write and semi structured interview themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Draw and Write Themes</th>
<th>Semi-Structured Interview Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hesitancy to intervene</td>
<td>Confusion in identifying bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult messages enabled students to defend</td>
<td>Adult Involvement in Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>themselves or others</td>
<td>• Fear of reporting to an adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Misconceptions involving reporting to an adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reporting to an adult is the only measure used to respond to bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Report to an adult in addition to getting revenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality overpowers adult suggestions</td>
<td>Minimal media influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for handling bullying</td>
<td>• Mass media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Social media served as a vehicle for bullying, but was not a powerful educator on bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages from home differ from messages</td>
<td>Messages from home differ from messages from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from school</td>
<td>• Contemplation of actions according to setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contemplation of actions causing hesitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contemplation of actions due to fear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering both sets of themes, a convergence began for the overall analysis. A convergence table was created as both sets of major themes from each data collection method were pieced together for the overall study. The draw and write themes fit within the major sections of the semi-structured interview themes since the themes in the interview section were more extensive. The convergence table labeled as Table 5 was used to guide the overall
discussion of the participants’ perceptions of bullying as well as managing multiple messages that they receive.

Table 5.

*Convergence table*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confusing Conflict and Bullying</th>
<th>Key:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confusion in identifying bullying (SS)</td>
<td>SS= theme from semi-structured interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hesitancy to intervene (DW)</td>
<td>DW= theme from draw and write</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult Involvement in Bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence of conflicting messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult messages enabled students to defend themselves or others (DW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality overpowers adult suggestions for handling bullying (DW)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict of School Influences and Home Influences of bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult Involvement in Bullying (SS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hesitancy to Intervene (DW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages from home differ from messages from school (SS)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media and Social Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimal Media Influence (SS)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall concepts were discussed from each major section created from the convergence. The concepts derived from all the themes were confusing conflict and bullying, adult involvement in bullying, and media and social media. The major themes supporting these sections were the overall guide to the discussion process. A combination of existing literature
and current findings of this study were addressed, and implications to educational and administrative practices to address bullying were also discussed and noted.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations should be taken with all participants, but special consideration was given due to working with children. This study was conducted for the sake of preventing future bullying instances and assisting children, schools, and parents with how to handle such unfortunate events. Since student data was used for the selection process, pseudonyms were used for each child. Parental consent forms for child participation were obtained and kept on file. Parents and students were allowed to opt out of the research for any reason at any time.

Due to the potential for emotional discussions, school guidance counselors remained available, but were not part of the interview process. Parents were not allowed to take part in the interview with their children and were notified of this caveat before the study. According to Randall (2012), parental presence may hinder the child from sharing their true views out of fear that they would paint the family in a negative light. Parents were welcomed to be at the interview site during the process, but none of the parents were present.

The children were not forced to participate in the drawing section, but they all did. One student did not feel comfortable about drawing at first, but chose on his own to continue and did not have an issue afterwards.

When working with the children, considerations were made to ensure their emotional stability, as well as the factual nature of the events that each child retold. The quality of the interview data comes from the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee, so special measures should be taken with children (Danby, Ewing, & Thorp, 2011).
Because of this, the researcher read literature on working with children and ways to interview and obtain true responses. According to Danby, Ewing, and Thorp (2011), the researcher considered inflection of voice during the interview process, as to not lead the child to an answer they may think is pleasing to the researcher. In addition, this allowed the researcher to repeat what the child said in order for the child to correct her if necessary in order to get a true account. The researcher also used the process of think-alouds while asking questions, and to encourage the child's perspective of the interview and not that of their parents. A least-adult membership role was employed, consisting of a reduction in the superiority of adults, and allowing the child to guide and lead the interview and interactions. Concrete artifacts from the children were also used to enhance the interpretation process by having pictures to guide the overall interpretation.

**Research Quality**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1994), one may enhance trustworthiness of a qualitative study by employing credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity. Each area was addressed through the research design by adding areas of trustworthiness throughout the project. Credibility was addressed through the usage of a researcher identity section identifying biases and prior experiences of bullying issues experienced by the researcher. A reflexive journal was kept in order to identify situations that may lead to bias and assist the researcher in remaining neutral throughout the process. Once those ideals were identified, they were bracketed out of the study in order for the child’s voice to be heard, not that of the experiences of the researcher.
Transferability was addressed through using a variety of ages of students from multiple schools. Though not all qualitative studies may be transferable, the attempt can be made that other settings or groups can benefit from the findings (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). This attempt is addressed through comparison of participants from Louisiana who all have the same anti-bullying policy and requirement of lessons.

Dependability was addressed through peer debriefing of bullying issues and experiences that have been described by the students. Assistant principals and guidance counselors were consulted throughout the process to discuss transcripts as well as the findings. Those discussions were informal in nature, but useful due to familiarity of the assistant principals to the students. Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that this checking is used with stakeholders, and considering that children are the recipients of the interviews at their particular schools, they are also stakeholders in this instance.

Follow-up discussions were also conducted with the participants to determine if the interpretations made by the researcher were accurate according to student responses. This was done to ensure that the interpretations made represent the voice of the children, and not the researcher.

Confirmability was considered through the usage of direct quotes from the children, as well as the use of the pictures to support the findings. Thick descriptions were used to support the child’s words, and direct quotes were included to enhance the descriptions provided.

Lastly, authenticity was confirmed through a triangulation method through the verification of data collection. The semi-structured interviews, draw-and-write illustrations, and supporting text were triangulated to ensure valid interpretations of the data. A critical appraisal
of all data collected was used and enhanced to determine the authentic value of the interpretations of the study.

**Researcher Identity**

As an assistant principal in an elementary school for the past seven years, I have experienced many instances of bullying and many instances of false claims of bullying. Through serving the position of disciplinarian, I have dealt with students who have truly bullied others, and witnessed the sadness and emotion involved with being the victim, at times crying right along with the child and family. On the other hand, I have become jaded when advice was given to children to either retaliate violently against someone who was bullying them, or when the term “bully” was used so freely as a “buzz word” that false accusations caused difficult times for students and their families. I have also felt the effects from parents who watched newscasts highlighting the topic and had to comfort them if their child was a victim. As a society, we are naturally educated on this topic, and as adults, we want to prevent the horrible phenomenon but don’t always know how. Wanting to help the children through this process is a passion of mine, and hopefully through research and understanding how the students deal with these messages can help in what we as educators teach them.

Over time, the topic of bullying has been addressed by a range of regular discipline measures to formalized polices that have been mandated in our schools. Each time the media covers a major instance of retaliation or suicide due to bullying, I have wondered how students and parents are affected by the exposure, as well as the information provided by the school. I believe that one must understand the experience before one can properly address the issue, so as
an administrator, understanding the child and what he may be dealing with may assist educators in addressing the overall problem of bullying.

I am fortunate to have never been a true victim of bullying. Though I have never experienced it myself, it does not mean I haven’t seen children suffer as victims. As a child, I was never strong enough to defend others who were bullied or put through hard times, but as an adult, I feel that I can do something about it. In this study, I hope to allow the child to speak, and let his perspective come to life. In understanding the child, we may actually be able to understand the problem.
Chapter 4

Results

The results of this study were derived from 11 hours of interviews with children between the ages of 8-10 years old. Additionally, the researcher used illustrations and interview questions from the draw and write technique to determine student perspectives of bullying and how these perspectives are influenced by education received from home, school, and the media. The experiences, though formal, informal, direct, or indirect, came in many different ways for these children. They were educated by being immersed in their environments whether the education is intentional or not. The following chapter will share the students’ perspectives on bullying, how these perspectives were formed, and how students made sense of the messages they were given.

The first part of the study took place through the use of the draw-and-write technique (Williams, Wetton, & Moon, 1989), in which students drew a picture of a bullying situation. This situation was either a real situation that they experienced in some capacity, or a situation that was seen or made up. Out of the 10 situations drawn, 7 of the 10 students chose to “make up” the bullying instance, whereas the other 3 illustrated real situations that were experienced.

A variety of illustrations were created. The most common drawings consisted of a victim, perpetrator, and one witness, in which the victim was being teased. Many times, the witness did not interfere or assist the victim in any way. However, other pictures were of physical bullying by either fighting in a sporting event, or some type of hitting during a conflict. It was difficult to determine if each picture consisted of a situation meeting a bullying definition, but the students were able to explain what they drew and why they drew it. This allowed them to
begin thinking of bullying and truly explain what they thought bullying is, all the while preparing them for the second part of the interview process.

**Themes derived from the draw-and-write technique**

**Hesitancy to intervene.** Participants were asked to describe what was happening in a picture they drew of a bullying situation. They were also asked to identify themselves in the picture. Many students drew themselves as witnesses to bullying and were asked to share why they reacted the way they did when they did not try to interfere or help the victim. Five out of the ten students described that they did not react due to fear. These students discussed different reasons for fear, but one of the biggest reasons that students as witnesses do not intervene in a bullying situation is the fear of retaliation from the bully. Bella, a 10-year-old girl from Raceway Elementary School, described the fear of being targeted by the bully and hit during the altercation even though the bullying situation in the picture was that of teasing. According to Bella, “The boys tease the person because the person doesn’t know how to play football. I’m worried.” She described that she was not the victim in the made up circumstance, but remained watching the altercation due to fear that the event would eventually become physical. She shared that she watched a video in which a witness did not interfere with a bullying situation due to fear of being hit themselves. Bella’s illustration is included as Picture 1.
According to Bella, “I’m just watching until I see a teacher. I’m worried about if the bully was going to hit the other person.” She shared that she learned this reaction from a video at school in Kindergarten, in which the witness did not interfere because, “The person was scared that the bully would hit him.” Bella took this concept from the video and applied the fear that she saw in the witness of the video to her drawing, making her feel that a witness should fear bullying and intervention when it occurs. The hesitation and worry experienced by Bella when she didn’t know how to react to a person being bullied caused her to remain frozen or possibly “turn the other cheek” in helping the victim. Livie and Kay, two 10 year old girls, described the idea of being confused at what to do, and hoped that ignoring the bullying would make it stop. Kay, who feels fear and hesitation when she experiences bullying, feels the pressure of making the right choice to stop the situation. Her drawing showed her, “Thinking of what I should do. Because if I did something wrong, the bully might start bullying me, and if I did something right,
he might just stop bullying.” Kay describes feeling hesitation because making the wrong decision could have negative consequences personally. She experienced conflict on wanting to make the situation stop, but at the same time, fears the consequences of her actions in getting involved in something that she was not involved in to begin with.

To further illustrate this hesitation, Kiana, a 9-year-old girl from Raceway Elementary, also experiences fear of becoming involved in bullying by getting in trouble with authority. Her illustration is presented in Picture 2.

![Picture 2: Kiana’s Illustration](image)

Her fear of involvement in any way is guided by the misconception that she will receive just as much trouble as the perpetrator if she somehow steps in the situation. She drew herself as the witness of bullying but did not react because, according to her, anyone involved in bullying will get in trouble. She described her reaction to bullying as,
(I was) Waiting for the ball. Because I didn’t want to get in trouble because we’d have to sit out for recess. If we go out with our French teachers, and we hit someone or get in a fight or they hear us cursing, we have to sit out for recess.

Feeling that possibly the child faced confusion on being “involved in the situation,” she was asked if she truly thought she would get in trouble if she stepped in to help the victim. She responded, “Yeah, because then I’d be in the situation.” Kiana’s perception of what happens in any type of involvement guided her hesitation. Though she claimed she learned to tell a teacher if she witnessed bullying from her counselor at school, she did not use this advice in this situation because of fear of involvement over-powered her ability to make the decision to ultimately help the victim. This is a case where the child knew the behavior her counselor had instructed her to use in a given situation, but might not be able to follow through in the moment. This is significant because she allows her misconception of being in trouble to stop her from doing what she knew was right in the first place.

For one student, his actions and perceptions of bullying changed based on the location the bullying occurred. According to Hal, bullying that happens at home as opposed to school can have different consequences and reactions. Hal also expressed fear of trouble in school if he reacts to a bullying situation as a victim. Hal drew a “made up” bullying situation in which he defended himself with words by telling the bully to stop. Hal’s illustration is included at Picture 3.
Hal claims he does not fear bullies and did not feel fear in the picture; however, he feels this way at home. When asked if he would have defended himself and not felt fear at school, he replied, “I’m glad it wasn’t! Because he would have been seriously fussed by the principal and I don’t want that to happen to him. I would have been involved in that too.” The fear of being involved overcame and changed his reaction based on where it would occur. Hal shared that his mother gives him the advice not to get involved in bullying events at school, and he perceives being a victim as involvement that could get him into trouble. Even though he was the described victim in the story, he felt that talking back to and defending himself would still somehow get him in trouble with the principal, and ultimately, his parents. He feels confident in defending himself at home, however, because he would not be involved in a situation that could cause a disturbance at school. This is significant because Hal may not do the right thing due to a misconception and a way to protect himself, when all along he may be doing himself more harm than good by not addressing a bullying situation.

For some students, parents provide suggestions on how to handle bullying situations based on their own fears regarding their child’s involvement. Charlie, a student at Woodland
Elementary, drew himself as a victim in a real bullying situation. He receives consistent messages from his mother that staying away from bullying as well as ignoring a bully even if he is the victim is the best approach to take when handling a situation. Charlie described,

My mom always told me that talking back to a bully will just make it worse and I’ll get in trouble because if I get in a fight with him, the teacher will fuss me and him for fighting.

This idea of being in trouble for the involvement can be either a misconception or a reality in some schools. Charlie’s mother would rather him ignore the bully as a victim and not retaliate due to the possibility of making the situation worse. His perception from his mother is not only will he be bullied, but he will also receive punishable consequences for standing up for himself. Because of this, the bullying continues and the victim does not react or know how to react appropriately to help himself or stop the bullying.

The sense of confusion faced by the child, either for trying to decide what is the right thing to do or trying to protect oneself, causes the student not to react. The children feel the need to protect themselves as much as possible, and in some ways, try to determine the lesser of two evils, whether to get in trouble at school or get in trouble with the bully. These children choose a form of self-preservation and take time to determine what will help them preserve their safety the most. In all of the cases described above, this self-preservation approach led to non-involvement and the bully being unimpeded in their actions.

**Adult messages enabled students to defend themselves or others.** The second theme that derived from the draw and write section concerns those that did choose to intervene as a
result of who they are. Several students indicated that they would defend themselves against a bully as a victim or witness or report it to an adult if necessary. Of the 10 participants, two students described their actions of self-defense based on what was learned from adults.

As a self-described victim from South Landing Elementary, Rayne chose to share her experience of being called names at school and her determination to stand up for herself. She felt very supported by her mother who tells her to defend herself and feels empowered by others when they help her through a situation. She experienced teasing about her last name, and received help from a witness, which in turn helped her to stand up for herself and make the bully stop. She feels confident in defending herself because her mother stresses it, so when she is bullied or called names like she experienced, she does not hesitate. This indicates the importance of having a support system during a bullying situation. Whether that support comes from a witness at the scene or support from home to stand up for oneself, the power differential has moved from the bully to the victim, since more than one person is opposing the bully. This concept is very important to share with children and could serve as motivation when a witness realizes the importance and power of this role.

Similarly, another student was given suggestions on how to handle bullying from an adult, and that advice was taken into consideration. Liam, a 10 year old boy from Raceway Elementary, made up a bullying situation which described himself as the victim at school. He described that being able to defend himself or someone else can come from determining whether the situation is a big or small situation. He describes bullying as a big situation and is automatically given to an adult to handle because kids should not take on big situations themselves. He shared that he did not experience bullying as a victim, but learned much about it
from his guidance counselor at school. He feels confident that reporting bullying at school would be helpful and in this situation, he would follow the direction of the counselor. The only determination that is made for Liam is deciding whether the situation is big or small. He described, “A little situation is where you can solve it; A big situation is where you can’t solve it.” Liam was able to distinguish that a little situation is something that could possibly be solved by a child, but physical altercations would require adult intervention. Liam’s drawing, as noted in Picture 4, illustrates how he handles his situations with words until the bully becomes physical, at which point an adult is summoned.

![Picture 4: Liam’s Illustration](image)

Liam is confident in addressing the bully when words are used, but understands that there are issues a child should not attempt on his own, and acts accordingly.
Personality overpowers adult suggestions for handling bullying. One student who chose to help a victim in his depiction of bullying credited only his personality as the reason he reacted the way he did. Hans, an 8 year-old boy, described his position as a witness to bullying and his desire to tell a teacher at the sight of someone being bullied. When witnessing bullying, Hans feels that a bully needs to learn a lesson, and by telling a teacher on the bully, that lesson would be given. Hans feels that he was never taught this concept and attributes these feelings to his personality. He claims he just, “knows about bullying.” Though he said he did experience bullying at school and once saw a commercial that discussed bullying, he did not feel that these influences were more powerful than who he is as a person.

Summary. There were many different circumstances that were drawn by the students, which included some that were truly experienced and some that were fabricated. However, in all situations, the perceptions of events and influences that the students experienced guided their reactions. The experiences that some of these children faced in school is that when a person is involved in bullying, they will always be in trouble no matter what is their active role in the situation. This idea is also experienced from home, which can be a dangerous misconception in helping children handle bullying. The students hesitate to react fully to the situation because of fear of the bully, as well as potential consequences handed to them by the adult. This forms somewhat of a hopeless situation that could cause more issues later in life.

Themes derived from semi-structured interviews

The second set of interviews were conducted immediately following the draw and write section. These interviews focused on a variety of questions to determine student perceptions of
bullying and influences to these children. A total of four master themes emerged from the interviews with the children. These themes are:

1. Confusion in identifying bullying
2. Adult Involvement in Bullying
3. Minimal media influence
4. Messages from home differ from messages from school.

Confusion in identifying bullying. The Louisiana State Department of Education defines bullying and requires that teachers teach their specific definition of bullying to all public school students. This definition is provided in Appendix A.

Out of the 10 students that were asked to describe what bullying means to them, six of the students did not know the true definition of bullying. A true definition would have encompassed some type of power differential between the perpetrator and the victim and a repeated offense (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Though the rhetoric used may encompass some of what happens when a child is bullied, such as gestures, teasing, and harm, some did not comprehend the true meaning in which one person has power over the other and the pattern of behavior exists.

When describing bullying, three of the students interchanged conflict or fighting and called it bullying. Kiana, shared that bullying occurs when, “You go and play with somebody and you could say sorry to the person and they started arguing with you…that’s bullying.”
Kiana focuses more on the argument, though she knew that a bullying situation is not pleasant and conflict is involved. She considers the idea of conflict a bullying situation, and not the true instance that includes the presence of power over one individual and repeated offense. She shared that she experienced bullying once where she witnessed a student trip another student. She shared, “When we had a fire drill, no a tornado drill, and we were all running out the class, and somebody tripped a person and laughed at them.” During this event, she experienced a child being purposefully hurt without remorse, which could be part of a bullying act, but she automatically perceives it as bullying. However, she expressed that this was a one-time event. When she was questioned if this happened more than once to the child, she answered, “No, well it’s bullying but not physical bullying. Like more than once.” At this point, her description of how the behavior was bullying, but not physical, showed her confusion on the topic.

She felt that an act that occurs more than once would be “physical bullying,” but described the event she experienced as “bullying” as not physical bullying. Though she had the concept that bullying can be considered hurtful of some sort, she still described conflict or students treating others poorly as bullying. Though this could have been part of a true bullying situation had this been repeated, she was confused at the terminology, using terms such as physical bullying, and determining that there may have been a difference between bullying and physical bullying, though she doesn’t quite understand that difference.

This idea was reiterated with Hal, who described bullying as a type of conflict as well. When asked to describe bullying in his own words, he gave examples of what happens when
being bullied, but contradicted that when he described a situation that he experienced. He described bullying as, “Getting hurt, beat up, called names and stuff.”

He perceives a person to be a bully who reacts in the following way,

I think they (the bully) were just mad at something but if they, if they were mad at me they probably would have hit me, but if they were mad at someone else and hit me it wouldn’t be bullying.

Though Hal understands that bullying could be hurtful, he does not discuss the specifics of power and repeated action. He does, however, understand that bullying involves a possible angry person and physical altercations, but does not explain or describe any further.

This concept was supported by Hans, who also exhibited confusion between actions such as fights and a true definition of bullying. He described bullying as behaviors from people who are, “Being rude, and like pushing people around and poking them.”

He did include attributes that some bullies are known to exhibit; however, when he told of his experience with bullying, he described what seemed to be a one-time incidence of a fight that occurred in French class. He experienced a fight in French class that he perceived as bullying, in addition to a neighborhood fight that he took part in. Both of these instances mean the same to him, and he considers these acts of bullying.

Though all these situations could warrant bullying situations if the students were victims or witnessed multiple instances of this to a victim, they described more of conflicts or “fights”
than actual repeated bullying situations, and did not describe repeated offenses or the offset of power in any of the descriptions.

Other students perceive bullying as a physical act and someone who “is being mean to you,” but don’t describe repeated incidences of the act, so it is difficult to determine that the experiences they describe are true bullying instances. Kay did understand the power component of bullying in that, “It means that a big person thinks he’s cooler than everybody else and he just likes to pick on people. (He) pushes and calls him names.” He gave an indication that one individual has power over the other, but didn’t include a repeated act. More confusion ensued by Mike, a student from South Woodland Elementary, as he provided a textbook description of bullying. However, as he experiences conflict, he too calls it bullying even though he was able to describe what bullying is in words. In the moment the behaviors occur, he reacts according to how he is told to handle bullying, but he doesn’t consider if it is conflict or true bullying. He is not able to identify and apply what bullying is even though he knows the definition well. Mike described bullying as, “To pick on somebody. Not just pick on somebody once, but true bullying is more than once.”

Mike shared that he experienced bullying at school in which he witnessed a boy repeatedly called “booger boy.” His perception in this instance did sound like a child was being bullied; however, when asked later in the interview to discuss bullying seen from the media, he talked about a show where someone was watching a girl get undressed and was later raped. He then expounded on this idea that he saw a program which told of an older man on social media who was portraying himself as a younger boy in order to talk to a girl on the Internet. Though these incidences are detrimental, he included them in areas that he has experienced bullying as he
has seen on TV or heard about on the Internet as bullying situations. He perceived unfortunate events as bullying and did not apply what he knows about the topic.

Of the 10 students interviewed, three students actually knew a similar definition of bullying and gave experiences that were true instances of bullying. Some of the descriptions included when someone “makes fun of your looks, keeps pushing you around, and hitting you.” All students recognized the repeated nature, and one even explained that he had never seen bullying at school, but rather only “fights,” knowing that the fight was not a bullying situation as some of his peers had described it.

Because of these descriptions of what bullying means to them and examples of what the students said they experienced, their perceptions of bullying is that of one-time incidences and person-to-person conflict rather than a power differential and repeated instances. At some point in the interview, eight students described themselves as being witnesses to what they perceived as bullying, but only three times was there enough evidence given to determine that the student actually knew the definition and could properly identify that the experiences they had were true bullying situations.

**Adult involvement in bullying.** The second theme identified through the semi-structured interviews is the involvement of adults in the bullying reporting process. All 10 students reiterated that they learned to report bullying to an adult from school lessons. A total of six students learned about bullying from the guidance counselor, and two learned from the DARE Officer. Two of the children did not indicate who taught them about bullying but did indicate that they learned about bullying from school.
**Fear of reporting to an adult.** The most common response of what students said they learned to do when they see bullying or experience bullying at school is to tell a teacher or an adult. However, the experiences that the students described did not all comply with this concept, even though they knew what to do based on bullying lessons. Choosing to report certain behaviors to an adult does serve as a daunting task for some students. Charlie shared that he learned to tell a teacher when he or someone else is being bullied, but there is always the stipulation to do it “when the bully is not looking” in order to avoid further bullying. He described, “At school, they usually say tell the teacher right away even though you’re still looking at them (the bully).” If the bully is anywhere around, he ignores the behavior and tolerates it in order to avoid being called a snitch.

In a completely different school, Mike claimed that he did indeed bully another student and confirmed that he bullies when he feels that other students “snitch” on him. He shared that he bullies others when they tell a teacher on him, so the act of reporting his behaviors actually increases his chances of bulling. When asked why he bullied a student, he shared, “Because they kept getting on my nerves. They kept snitching. I told him to shut up with his ugly tail. I kept doing it because he kept snitching.”

He did say that he was told to tell a teacher when someone bullies others; however, when someone uses the advice on him, he uses it as a reason to continue the bullying. In this case, he uses knowledge that, even though he would recommend someone to report bullying by others, he will retaliate if it is used on him. This confirms fears of children such as Charlie, who will not report bullying in front of the bully.
Misconceptions involving reporting to an adult. However, reporting to a teacher is not
the first reaction that some students feel comfortable engaging in. Kay described hesitation
when trying to decide what to do in bullying situations, especially when telling a teacher of the
incident may garner not so favorable results. According to Kay,

I don’t know if I should tell a teacher or tell them (the bully) something myself.
Because teachers sometimes tells us that’s tattling so if you go up and tell them
yourself, that might stop more than if the teacher stops it. Because sometimes if
you tell a teacher they are calling them a name, the teachers say, ‘stop calling
them a name, and that’s it.’

Kay expresses confusion at this point on what is the best situation, which delays her
reaction of what to do. She tries to make sense of what is the best reaction, but doesn’t know
whether it’s something she should take into her own hands for fear of nothing being done to help
the victim because of possible tattling.

Some students who confuse bullying for conflict have a difficult time knowing when to
tell an adult and they miss an opportunity to help others or themselves. The first idea is that
some children have a misconception that “telling” causes involvement, and therefore they stay
clear of the situation to not have involvement at all. Though they may be a witness, the fear of
telling makes them hesitate to react. Kiana described a situation where she froze during what she
called a bullying situation, but what was really an altercation or a fight. When asked if there was
a time she did not know what to do during a bullying situation, she described the time she
witnessed a fight, “They started fighting and I just back up and stayed away.” When asked why
she didn’t tell a teacher, she disclosed that this was a time that she was afraid of getting in trouble by being perceived to be involved in the situation, so she stayed completely away. Though the fight she described was a time two students were fighting over a basketball, she missed an opportunity to try to help by getting an adult for a potentially dangerous situation. She was afraid to get in trouble by being involved in the incident. She also falsely perceived this as bullying, which made it difficult for her to react appropriately to situations of conflict and instances of real bullying.

**Reporting to an adult is the only measure used to respond to bullying.** However, three students felt that telling an adult directly without any type of self-defense or self-handling was the best answer no matter what the situation. Bella, for instance, felt that reporting all instances to a teacher is the best option and follows what she learns in the school setting. She does not distinguish between something she could possibly handle as opposed to something an adult should handle.

Though Charlie did describe true bullying, he also described a situation that he ignored and told an adult that he may have been able to handle himself. His immediate response is to ignore and report; no matter if he encounters situations that he may be able to defend himself with words without involving an adult.

**Report to an adult in addition to getting revenge.** Lastly, there was one student who did provide some understanding of telling an adult, but heightened his reaction with revenge for the bully. Hans shared his experiences of what he learned as, “You always have to tell an adult and if you are ever getting bullied, don’t fight back because you could get hurt or they would be even
more mean. So tell a teacher.” He shared what he learned in class and explained that telling an adult would be the first response. However, he explained other behaviors that he could engage in which contradict the no-fight back lesson.

[You could] get the kid’s who’s bullied out and get them a band aid if they’re bleeding….I didn’t really learn that, it’s just if you hurt somebody actually they should get more pain, like they did, not like punch them or anything but just like, hurt their feelings because you already hurt them and you already hurt their feelings even worse. So you don’t want to hurt them a lot but you do want to hurt their feelings a little bit because they need to regret it.

His reasoning described a possible pre-meditated retaliation. Though telling a teacher and not fighting back are the suggestions that he learned from the school, his actions show a different perspective. He believes that sometimes retaliation can stop the bullying by teaching the bully a lesson, and he would take this into his own hands. He feels that more is needed to stop the bullying than telling the teacher alone and would possibly employ these ideas if required of him.

**Summary.** Though all students reported that they learned to tell an adult when witnessing or experiencing bullying, students faced problems with this because they cannot identify true bullying, fear retaliation, or in one case, appreciates the value of retaliation. Telling an adult is the most profound suggestion given by the school to students, and their use of that suggestion can be helpful, but students do not always use it in the best capacity.
Minimal media influence. Lessons learned from both mass media and social media did not prove to be very influential to the participants of this study. Five out of the ten students claimed they had received suggestions from mass media or social media, but none of the students said it was a major factor in how they made decisions on reacting to bullying.

Mass Media. Students were asked if they had experienced education through television, news programs, or any other type of mass communication. The students shared that when they received suggestions from television programs or videos on how to handle bullying, they were very similar to what is taught in schools. Mostly, the students experience direction that guides them to “tell an adult” if they experience bullying, but nothing profoundly different from the education they receive in the school environment. One student felt that mass media is not a reliable form of education on any topic. According to Kay, “Sometimes you can’t trust TV because they have fake stuff. But the school and your parents are trying to help you know that and to do something right and not get hurt.” Though she claimed that she did view a television show which highlighted bullying and showed an example that a victim should tell a bully to stop and tell a teacher, she really did not have much experience with media education at all. She claimed to not watch the news or have experience hearing about bullying through these avenues.

Three students did view a television program on bullying, but didn’t remember the channel or even name of the program. Livie shared that she learned to tell a teacher about bullying when it’s witnessed, but did not discuss this as an influence in her decision making process at all. Though it was seen as a television program or commercial, the suggestions for help were very much the same and basically addressed telling an adult. In addition, 4 of the 10 students shared that they did not learn about bullying on television at all.
Mass media outlets did not provide very powerful, educational topics to these participants. Consequently, only two of the ten students claimed they would consider the media’s advice in conjunction with both their parents and the school’s advice. The suggestions of “telling a teacher or adult” when experiencing bullying is also a very important message from school, so it is difficult to distinguish if the media plays an important role in their decision making process. All suggestions shared from the participants that were received from mass media were researched interventions to bullying, and those messages are reiterated through educational settings.

**Social media served as a vehicle for bullying, but was not a powerful educator on bullying.** Students were asked to discuss their experiences in learning about bullying from social media and electronic communication. Seven out of the ten students shared that they do have a social media profile and hold a page on certain social media sites. However, not all of these students indicated that they experienced education from these sites, even though they have experienced using them. Only one student claimed to have experienced an anti-bullying lesson on her Snapchat page created by Team Snapchat. When asked if she had social media, she said she did, and explained that she saw a video or snap of a person being bullied at a parade.

It was one that Team Snapchat gave me and it was this guy, that um they were at a parade and he was getting bullied from the, he got beads and stuff. They said, stand up for yourself.
She claimed that she viewed a lesson on bullying by telling a viewer “what” to do, but not how to do it. Then she changed her story and said that she gets many ideas on how to handle bullying from Snapchat.

Liam also shared his experience with learning about bullying on YouTube, but said the suggestions to handle a bullying situation are the same as those he learned at school. He explained that he watched a video on bullying from YouTube, while he learned to never hit back and to tell a teacher if bullying is experienced. He also shared information from a YouTube program in which a bully may face legal ramifications if the bullying does not cease. He did say that the lessons learned at school as well as on YouTube were similar, but he did not have any other experience with social media or bullying through any media outlets.

Another way students were influenced by social media was by indirect means through their siblings. Though they did not experience education from social media itself, two students said they learned to avoid situations on social media through watching their older siblings experience trouble with cyber bullying. Hal shared that his older sisters experienced students sharing inappropriate messages on social media outlets, and because of that, his mother directs all her children not to get involved with any type of bullying situations. The student’s reaction results back to the parent’s fear of retaliation in cyber bullying, so he would not get involved in the situation.

I hear my sisters talking about people getting bullied so you don’t get involved in it. My mom don’t want them to get involved in that stuff. Because you might get bullied if you get involved in it.
He didn’t learn a lesson from social media directly, but he indirectly learned that bullying can take place in this electronic setting. His idea supports that it is appropriate to leave the situation and not get involved for the sake of self-preservation. His parent feels fear and directs that fear to her child, which causes him to feel it is best to not respond to cyber bullying as a witness or victim.

Another student shared her experience with cyber bullying, but handled the situation on her own with suggestions she learned through being bullied face-to-face. She described how she was bullied on Instagram regarding a 100th day of school shirt. She replied, “I made a shirt for the 100th day of school, and then I posted a picture of it and the kids said that it looks like a piece of “s” word. I said that’s not nice and then I blocked them.” When asked if anyone defended her, she shared, “My friend, you can send like a private message, then she did that to them saying don’t mess with my friend.”

Though she wasn’t taught lessons on social media about how to handle a cyber bullying situation, she did credit her experience with being bullied in person as the reason she defended herself. Her reactions were influenced from information and suggestions her mother taught her, not necessarily information she learned on social media or the Internet.

Overall, only half of the students interviewed experienced lessons from either mass media outlets or social media. Though some shared experiences of knowing the meaning of cyber bullying, they did not share experiences of how to handle cyber bullying or address the impact of how serious cyber bullying could become as discussed in previous sections of research.
Home messages differ from school and media messages, causing contemplation of actions according to setting, hesitation, or fear. One of the biggest issues that the students experience is deciphering between what they are taught to do by different, influential sources. Their reaction time and confidence in handling bullying situations is compromised because of their confusion and fear in having to make the best choice on how to handle it appropriately. Seven out of the ten students described a contradictory account between school and home on how to react to and handle a bullying situation.

Contemplation of actions according to setting. Several students were provided lessons from school staff on how to handle bullying, but their education from home plays an important role on the ultimate action taken. Their actions were contemplated based on influences, but they reacted impulsively and didn’t necessarily follow a predictable pattern. Liam experienced lessons at school from his guidance counselor and was able to reiterate what bullying means as well as suggestions on handling it. He learned to never be disrespectful and to tell an adult when bullying occurs, but claimed that these suggestions do not help him to handle bullying in the neighborhood. His powerful lessons about bullying are derived from his mother and older siblings whom he claimed were bullied in the past. He described a difference between his reactions when someone is physical and when someone uses words to bully another person. He shared that, in contrast to what is learned at school, his mother gives him advice on if he’s ever bullied. He was told, “If they hit you, hit them back.” However, he reacts differently if a bully teases him or others with words as opposed to any type of physical bullying. Liam believes that if a person is bullied with words, he would react differently. He claimed, “Don’t say anything back ‘cuz words are something that just comes out your mouth, but hit is hitting your body.”
He reiterated that words do not matter and it is easier to dismiss teasing. He feels that words do not hurt as much as hits, kicks, or punches. However, he shared an experience in which he was called names and was upset by this, contrary to his prior admission that words do not hurt. He described the situation happening at home because behavior is expected differently at school. In his experience, “I got in a fight. I hit him. He hit me first. He called me names first.” Liam did not follow the suggestions to ignore the “words,” and actually ended the process with a physical altercation. The difference came when he shared his experiences with being bullied at school in comparison to at home. He expressed that at school he would have to follow school rules, such as telling a student to stop, telling an adult, and even resorting to involving the principal. However, he explained that a student who hits him at school must not be hit in return at school. His mother taught him that if he is hit at school, he cannot hit back, but he must go “get him in the streets” after the school day has ended. The neighborhood and school environments warrant completely different reactions and expectations given to the students by some parents.

Similar considerations of how to react were experienced by Mike due to family modeling and suggestions. Mike experienced many anti-bullying lessons from his counselor whom he described frequently, however, he claimed he was actually considered a bully at one time and shared that he behaved that way based on influences from his sister. He shared that his sister’s behavior of “beating up” a girl who “snitched” on her for skipping school serves as an influence for his own behavior. He reacts to others based on witnessing his sister’s behavior, but knows that if he gets in trouble at school for bullying, his mother would be upset with him. He explained his confusion through these multiple messages from his home. His mother advises
him to “walk away” from those who bully others, but his sister models “to do the same things she do,” which is to show aggression to those who report her for her behaviors. He also said that his dad tells him to “beat them up” in regards to students who may try to bully him. Previously, he did provide a viable definition of bullying which indicates that he can distinguish bullying from conflict. However, when asked to share whom he would listen to in regards to reacting to bullying, his mother and father’s expectations were more powerful than the school suggestions. He believes he would follow the direction of his, “Mom and Dad, because my dad tells me to protect myself and my mom teaches me to stay out of trouble.”

He shared that he makes these decisions because “My sister and my daddy, he used to always get in trouble.” He attributes his behavior to these models, but he knows that his father really wants him to behave in school. He expressed that even if he listens to his father’s suggestions to hit at school, he would be in trouble because school is not an acceptable place for physical behavior. This behavior is only excused at home. Mike engages in a process of determining what he knows is right, what he is told he can do, and what is needed in order to determine his reaction. His immediate reaction to bullying or basic conflict with others can vary from any one of the suggestions, and may include physical retaliation because of what he knows. His home life is a major influence over him in comparison to school influences.

*Contemplation of actions causing hesitation.* The feeling of confusion in how to act can be more prevalent in some children than others, but is present when decisions must be made and children want to please the adults around them. Hans feels that getting involved as a witness of bullying by telling a teacher or defending someone with words is a good option for him. He reiterated this concept in the draw and write section as well as through his interview. He knows
that through school and one television commercial that the best way to handle bullying as a witness or victim is to tell an adult and not fight back with the bully. Deciding not to fight back comes from the idea that he doesn’t want to get in trouble at school, however, he is conflicted by what his parents tell him.

They (his parents) said like, to um, if they hurt YOU (points to self), then you could get them back, but if they hurt your feelings or something just go tell a teacher or an adult.

He feels the need to distinguish between different types of bullying and reactions to each, but when he described having to choose who he’d listen to, he chose that he wouldn’t listen to his parents. He shared, “Actually I don’t really like hurting people because it would hurt me even more and I don’t really like hurting people and hurting their feelings.” He feels an internal battle of how to react even though he knows his parents might expect differently of him. When asked how his parents would feel about him not retaliating if he was hurt physically and if they would be supportive of that response, he exclaimed “not that much, like no really.”

He would have to intentionally disobey what his parents have directed him to do because of his internal thoughts, in addition to what the school tells the students to do. His sense of self in not wanting to hurt someone causes conflict even though he may have to face disappointment from his parents.

*Contemplation of actions due to fear.* In contrast, some students fear trouble from their parents if they do get involved. Some parents prefer that students stay out of issues with other kids in order to protect them, even if the child is serving as a witness and trying to help a victim
through a situation. Getting involved may put their child in a situation that they do not need to be involved in, and fear that their child may then be bullied also. Hal described a situation at school when he learned to tell others if someone is bullied and to stand up for others, but at home, his mother portrays different expectations.

Well at school, I learned to tell people about it and like home, I don’t know, at home, I hear my sisters talking about their friends getting bullied so you don’t get involved in it. My mom don’t want them to get involved in that stuff….because they might get bullied if they get involved in it.

He experiences his mother giving advice to his older siblings; therefore, he takes that information and he applies it to his own experiences. Hal’s mother fears that if her children put themselves in the bullying situation even by defending someone, they could become a victim themselves. Her advice is to not become involved at all. Therefore, Hal claimed that if he had to choose between listening to suggestions from school on how to handle bullying or listen to his family, he would listen to his family. He shared, “Well I'd probably do what I learned at home because I don’t want to get in trouble.”

Because of this, he would go against helping someone as a self-protection feature because his family would prefer him to stay out of situations that aren’t his own. Though he says he knows what to do if he ever faces bullying, he said he witnessed bullying and didn’t know what to do. He hesitated and only got involved because the adult was near; however, he wouldn’t have if the adult had not seen the incident. This again was due to the fear of getting in trouble.
and being placed in the situation wrongfully, and should his parents find out he joined in, even if it was to help, he felt unsure of whether he was doing the right thing.

Parental fear of their child’s involvement with bullies also influences other students’ decisions as well. Both Kay and Charlie feel that the school advocates telling an adult and intervening when a bullying situation arises; however, parents tell their children to avoid these situations or hide that they are telling an adult because of the possibility of others finding out. Therefore, these children have to consider disobeying what their parents tell them to do in contrast to what the school claims is the best response. Though these students are given tools by the school in how to handle situations or react to bullying behaviors, they are still deciding what is best to do, either listening to what the teachers tell them or how their parents have described that they could cause more harm than good if they became involved.

Many students encounter a crossroads or decision-making period where they have to decide what is best on how to react to bullying. If a student is a victim or witness, and in some cases the bully, their decisions are influenced by the powerful adults around them. They experience education at multiple sites and have to process what is the best response, not only to help the student or themselves as the victim, but to know they made the right decision as to not get in the trouble by their parents or school. They feel that making the wrong decision can cause them to go against what they are taught, which hinders the prevention of bullying behaviors. These influences are very powerful to children, and in many cases can make a student feel comfortable or uncomfortable about reacting to help in a bullying situation.
Summary. Through all the themes, students have to make sense of what bullying is by those who do not necessarily know the true definition of bullying. Not knowing the true definition prevents a student from identifying when a real bullying situation is happening. A student has to determine if the behavior is indeed bullying and then must respond based on what they are taught to do. However, they may be able to handle a situation better by not considering it bullying. Children learn from school that they are to handle bullying by reporting it to an adult, and in some instances, telling the bully to stop or intervening when it is seen, but if the student cannot identify bullying properly, they struggle with what to do. They experience fear that they will get in some type of trouble for tattling, however if they knew that the situation was truly bullying, they would not have to worry about tattling. In addition, some students fear retribution from not only the bully, but by going against what a parent or family models for them to do. Students feel this sense of worry that they are getting involved and putting themselves in an unfortunate predicament because they could get bullied, in addition to upsetting their parents at home for reacting the way they do. The idea of wanting to please their parents sometimes negated the researched ways that the students are taught to handle bullying in school, which puts the students facing a conundrum, and inadvertently, could cause the bullying behaviors to continue.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications

Through the draw and write technique and student interviews, participants provided experiences of bullying, information learned from multiple sources, in addition to their perceptions of what bullying means to them. The following section begins with a review of the three research questions that were considered throughout the study in order to determine the true sense-making process that children experience. A synopsis of each inquiry is included as well as discussions on how the data gathered satisfies each question. Overall, themes and concepts from both the draw and write section and the semi-structured interviews are converged and discussed, as well as implications for practice in educational administration and school systems handling bullying. Finally, connections between existing literature and the current data from this study are included to support and discuss further knowledge gathered regarding students and influences of bullying education.

Review of Research Questions

**What are the perceptions of bullying held by elementary school students (ages 8-10)?** Participants of this study shared their perceptions of bullying through drawings and explanations of bullying experiences. Though all students within the district receive education on what bullying entails, the majority of children confused conflict with bullying. The bullying definition provided by the state is very specific and encompasses behaviors that could be considered in person-to-person conflict, however, in order to receive disciplinary consequences for bullying, the offense must be repeated and a power imbalance over the victim must exist.
These children’s perceptions are that bullying occurs when a child is teased, hurt, participate in a fight, or feel marginalized by another individual. Some participants did indicate that a pattern of behavior must exist or the bully must have power over the individual in the process of the altercation. Nevertheless, they also shared that a child being teased is a child being bullied, no matter how many times it happened. Their perceptions are that a person who is hurtful to another is a person is a bully. This in turn poses a problem with Louisiana’s definition. The students feel that they are to tell an adult or intervene when they feel bullied, yet the first time a student faces a negative situation from another and tells an adult, they have to face it again before a consequence for bullying can occur.

As evidence from the study, children perceive that bullying should be handled by an adult through reporting it to a teacher, staff member, or parent. They also feel fear that if they do, there may be retaliation from the bully, pose more trouble through misconceptions, or disappoint a parent or family member by their actions. All in all, their perception is that bullying can be handled, but they sometimes choose not to for the sake of preventing more negative repercussions from when the bullying began.

**How do students describe bullying messages from home, school, and the media (including social media)?** A variety of bullying messages were described from the participants, though most indicated that a conflict was present amongst home and school. All students in the study described that they were taught lessons at school about bullying, described what behaviors they considered to be bullying, as well as described how to handle it. Bullying messages were mostly received from school counselors or lessons during the DARE program, and the consensus
among these individuals was to report bullying to an adult and try to defend themselves through words, not physical actions.

However, the messages received from home were quite different. Some students indicated that their parents or family suggested telling an adult when bullying occurs, however, many others had different instructions. To start, the participants discussed these reactions based on what they perceive to be bullying, so their reactions derived from one-time conflict to true bullying. There was no separation. Self-defense was important to some parents, but implications were always present. For instance, some families suggest that words can be ignored, but physical actions cannot be. These physical actions of bullying however cannot be handled at school, but must be handled at home. In addition, participants discussed parental conflict amongst each other in that one parent wants the child to retaliate to bullying, whether physical or not, and one discourages it. The child must then decipher whom to follow and how to react based on what parents are suggesting. Lastly, students described messages from parents that they should not become involved when they are not victims of bullying due to the fear of retaliation. Students then feel that they have to carefully decide what to do in order to please their parents in the messages.

Messages received from the media were not very prominent amongst the children in this study. Some received messages through social media sites, which consisted of the same concepts that were taught at school; however, most of them shared that they did not have access to social media or did not experience many messages from the media. Those that did receive messages from both mass media and social media described that suggestions on how to handle
bullying were the same messages they received from school. They indicated that school
messages were more frequent due to being present in lessons during the school day.

**How do students make sense of the multiple bullying messages they receive?** The
sense making process of students was examined through the draw-and-write section as well as
semi-structured interviews. As stated earlier, those who experience home messages and school
messages similarly may feel confident that their decisions to act against a bully will be supported
by adults. According to the data, those students were comfortable telling an adult about bullying
they experienced or witnessed, but that confidence did not take away the fear of the bullying
situation itself. Some experienced fear of the bully, but also fear in the repercussions of telling
an adult or the misconception that involvement would cause them to be in as much trouble as the
bully. Students faced the possibility of having to disappoint parents or adults based on the
decision that they ultimately make to react. The following description outlines the sense-making
process that leads to a student’s reaction when they encounter a bullying situation.

**Bullying reaction.** Based on the results and implications of this study, a model was
constructed through the influences and experiences of children when they witness or fall victim
to bullying, in addition to the sense-making process a child experiences. It does not address the
decisions a bully makes because enough data has not been collected on this area to make a solid
determination regarding those decisions.

Addressing these issues may help narrow down the stress a student faces and assist them
in their reactions to bullying. When a student witnesses or feels they are a victim to bullying,
whether it is a true instance of bullying or not, they must decide upon the behavior and identify it
appropriately. This decision, in the case of many of our participants, is based on conflict or true bullying, but to them, it is treated like bullying because that is what they perceive it to be. Because of this, they choose to apply what they have learned in order to react to what they are experiencing, in whatever capacity. From this, a process occurs where the child must weigh their options of what is the best decision based on their influences and who holds the most power over them. If a consensus is present among the influences and the child on how to handle bullying, the process of addressing the problem is less stressful. However, in other cases, influence is usually driven by some sort of fear, based on retaliation from the bully, which is either their own fear or a fear placed on them by the possible parent, trouble at school, or the misconception of involvement which would cause trouble at school. They also perceive that their parents may be disappointed in their reactions, though this may be a misconception as well. These areas are considered before a student even begins a reaction to help or intercede in a bullying situation. This causes delay and uncertain responses in children, sometimes leading to no response at all. Because of these reactions, the bullying experienced could continue because the situation is not properly addressed. Students spend time making sense of what they should do and focus on the possibilities of negative outcomes rather than assisting themselves or others with positive outcomes, which could put a stop to bullying at the moment.

**Discussion**

**Confusing conflict and bullying.** Students were confused in both the draw-and-write section as well as the interview as to the true meaning of bullying. Kiana clearly used conflict as multiple examples of bullying; through her illustration of the basketball fight during French, as well as her description of the bullying she experienced when another student was tripped, she
confirmed that she considered bullying and conflict interchangeable. The same situation occurred with Hal when illustrating the altercation with bullying. He shared that a person punched him in the face; however, later reiterated that this happened at home, not at school, and he didn’t want it to happen at school because he didn’t want his friend going to the principal’s office. His definition as well as his description in the illustration indicated that he was confused on the concept of conflict between two people as a one-time event and two people who are having a disagreement or physical altercation. In this, both students hesitated to intervene and did not react based on their lack of confirmation that they would be involved in a bullying situation.

Students drew pictures to explain bullying situations, and they consisted of behaviors that could have been bullying and did have a differentiation of power, but it was not known if the behavior was repeated. In one particular case, Bella described a situation as a witness where a student was being mean to another while playing football and shared that it happened more than once. However, as discussed in the semi-structured interview, she experienced a bullying situation that happened once and never happened again, which in turn would not be considered bullying based on the definition in Louisiana.

So what is the problem with this? According to Purcell (2012), children are provided with a plethora of bullying definitions, and it is difficult to decipher which definition is best to use, as well as specifics from each definition. Children in Purcell’s study determined bullying by gender and characteristics, which illustrates a variety of issues that could arise when trying to determine when bullying truly takes place. In comparison to the data presented here, students perceive bullying as confrontation, conflict, and in some case criminal behavior, rather than the
power differential and repeated nature of events that make one a true victim and true perpetrator of bullying. Students who do not know the definition of bullying and cannot properly identify what bullying is, may over use the term, leading to intense investigations under the incorrect policies. The consistency between Purcell (2012) and this study is that students are presented with even more difficulty in their perceptions, causing confusion as to what they are actually facing, no matter how they see it, and this may inhibit an appropriate reaction to the problem.

Many of the students described that they would turn a bullying situation over to an adult, but may somehow miss the opportunity to defend themselves because if the situation isn’t bullying, it may be something they can handle. Students miss the opportunity to stand up for themselves if they are told negative things or if they are offended, and think this behavior is bullying so they tell a teacher. Confusion then leads to whether or not it will be handled by an adult and could result in a teacher thinking the student is “tattling” as one student reflected.

Knowing the difference between conflict, bullying, and what students can actually attempt to handle on their own could make a difference in the amount of investigations taken on by administrators. According to these findings, students are confused about what constitutes bullying and what does not. The data suggested in this study is similar to the data presented by Mishna (2004), in which students confuse conflict with bullying and use the terms interchangeably.

In addition, schools are required to follow a lengthy and very specific definition of bullying that students may not fully grasp. In Louisiana schools, a determination of bullying warrants an intense investigation with serious consequences. There is also a lengthy process that administrators, parents, and students experience in order to do the investigation. False claims of
bullying can cause a tremendous amount of stress on parents and students. If students use the term “bully” for conflict, it can be difficult and time consuming to decipher what truly needs to be addressed. Though conflict should be addressed by adults in some cases, the procedures of handling conflict and handling bulling are not the same in Louisiana. According to Hall and Cook (2012), a child can feel validated by allowing one to handle situations and feel confident in their responses. This will in turn help them to become productive adults. A child’s self-worth is increased when they feel that they are able to express themselves through those avenues rather than a parent or adult always forcing their ideals and protection on the child. By affording children to stand up for themselves in situations that they actually can defend themselves in can increase their feelings of self–efficacy. They realize that adults are very helpful and are needed in many circumstances, but students do not need adults always fighting their battles for them.

**Adult Involvement in Bullying**

**Conflict of School Influences and Home Influences of bullying.** According to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1994) ecological systems theory, both those in the school setting as well as those in the home setting are part of the microsystem influencing an individual. Naturally, if they are perceived to have the same level of influence, one may question what can happen if the two powerful influences contradict one another. According to the data presented here, children are still very influenced by adults around them, especially those they perceive as having power over them. When those influences support the same theme or idea, the individual can feel confident that they are receiving sound advice and know what to follow.
However, 7 out of the 10 students are forced to decipher conflicting messages on how to handle bullying situations as victims, witnesses, and even a perpetrator. Students who received mixed messages from school to home have a difficult time processing the right decision when experiencing bullying, hence causing valuable reaction time to be lost and extra stress and worry about making the right decision. Sometimes, it causes the child not to react at all. Students experienced uncertainty that there will be some type of consequence from either the school or home that prevents them from making a decision on how to act.

Some students experience the misconception that if they are involved in an incident at school, even as a witness or a victim, they could receive consequences because they would be involved in the situation. When children are told that they should not interfere with a bullying situation, the child internalizes that even defending someone as a witness may get them in trouble with their parents or with school officials because they have chosen to become “involved.” They perceive the involvement as a negative interaction, therefore are not comfortable with defending others. Their perception of involvement is misinterpreted, whereas, their perception of what their parents are telling them could also be misinterpreted. A parent’s fear that the child could become a victim if they participate as a witness is a legitimate concern, and that anxiety makes the child hesitate to become involved in a situation to help others. This instance is a clear indication supported by Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1994) ecological systems theory where parental beliefs are set forth in the decision making process of the child. The child makes sense of what the parent is saying, and it causes them to not help themselves or others if needed. There is a sense of fear through the children, but mostly this stems from them being involved in instances that are not bullying. For instance, the child who drew a picture of a
conflict during French class and assumed it was bullying expressed that she didn’t want to be part of the conflict because she didn’t want it to appear that she was enhancing the problem. This misconception by the child stems from not understanding a true bullying situation, as well not understanding that a person helping a child who is bullied does not contribute to the problem, but helps prevent the problem. Their perception of what is happening is inaccurate; therefore their response can be different also. With that being said, not all students have the confidence to react as a witness to defend someone who is being bullied, but for those who are, these misconceptions may prevent them from possibly helping another individual in a difficult situation.

Secondly, some students shared experiences that school lessons teach students to verbally tell a bully to “stop” as either a witness or report the situation to an adult. However, the powerful influence of parents and home life over takes what is being taught in the school environment, causing the student to react differently which may cause more of a problem than help. Students reported that they are taught to tell a bully to stop bullying or report to an adult, but believe that being physical in defending themselves would make more of an impact because they are told to be this way by one or more parent in the household. A supporting study regarding influences of ecological systems theory on the functions of parental involvement along with a school climate of bullying behaviors has been compared (Lee & Song, 2012). It is pertinent based on this information and the current data that focus is placed on the consistency between school and home in addressing bullying situations since the overall school climate can be affected by multiple students being influenced by a variety of parental ideas on how to handle bullying.
Though few studies were available to compare the confusion students face from three influential entities, Englander (2013) suggests that students experience a bullying conundrum when faced with multiple influences guiding them toward the most effective response to bullying. Though Englander’s (2013) study addressed the multiple messages students face, as well as misconceptions that children face about reporting bullying to adults, she indicated an increase in anxiety produced by the media. The data gathered here is supported by these concepts, with the exception of the media component of her study. This data disputes that suggestion since to these participants, the media did not appear to have a significant influence on children, especially as opposed to school and parental influence. Electronic media, though discussed more frequently, was used more as a social outlet than as a place where students learned about bullying or were faced with bullying. Consequently, Livie did experience cyber bullying and indicated that this experience was no more detrimental than face-to-face bullying.

It is important to understand that when students are encouraged to “tell,” it does not eradicate them from the responsibility of trying to address the situation on their own. Kay experienced difficulty distinguishing whether she should report bullying at all because it is sometimes perceived as tattling. Englander (2013) shared that this concept is a reality for many young children. It is also important not to over use the word bully since it hinders a person’s ability to recognize behaviors and creates more victims, which is important to consider with some of these participants because some feel that the only way to handle a bullying problem is through an adult, without the handling anything themselves.

In addition, the data here suggests that students may face parent vs. parent conflict, in that one parent suggests that a student ignores a bully and reports the incident to an adult, and the other parent suggests standing up for themselves and resorting to physical altercations if
necessary. For example, Mike experiences a challenge that if he reacts the way one parent wants, he will upset the other, and will experience disappointment either way. The power of these influences in the microsystem again contradicts each other, making for a stressful situation for the child. The child then makes sense of where the situation happens and what would be acceptable responses from the parents. For instance, Liam, who may be bullied at school will react differently to how he would react at home because he is taught to be physical at home, but not at school. The child reacts by going outside of the school to be psychological with the bully. That being said, the cycle of violence continues, when children could have possibly dealt with the problem through proven anti-bullying strategies through the school. The influence of the home is quite powerful in determining how to react with bullying. The hesitation a student experiences or even immediate reactions could be more peaceful if students are able to make the decision according to what is taught to them by researched strategies.

**Absence of conflicting messages.** The evidence collected here suggests that for some students, there is little conflict in bullying messages and they perceive a general consensus from the multiple sources. According to Cross and Barnes (2014), school lessons cannot be successful without parental agreement on how to handle it. In the absence of conflicting messages, the evidence presented suggests that students may be more likely to intervene in bullying situations. Three out of the ten students expressed that they react to bullying situations as a victim or witness by standing up for others because that is who they are, and they have a strong sense of self. The influence of home and school are more balanced, and they take the suggestions on how to react based on situations as well as who they are as a person. They know that they are strong willed and have the confidence to make the choice because they experienced similar instruction
from both school and home, leading to a more positive reaction to bullying. Though Bella may have expressed that she was worried about the situation, it wasn’t worry from a reaction of what to do, rather a worry of what was happening. Participants expressed confidence in standing up for others and themselves because the adults in their life showed more of a consensus than a conflict.

**Mass media and social media.** In triangulating the data from the draw-and-write section with the semi-structured interviews, only one student credited media as an influential source as of bullying education. There was minimal influence of media in either portion of the data collection. Students shared that they do experience some bullying lessons on television programs and the information they learned did not contradict what they are learning from the school. However, school lessons are face-to-face through counselors and DARE officers, and more frequent than the media exposure. For these children between the ages of 8-10, the majority of students did have experiences with social media and some learned of situations that their older siblings may have encountered through social media, but were not affected directly themselves. Comparing studies from Ockerman, et al. (2014) and Randa (2015), cyber bullying from social media occurs frequently in middle school ages, which supports the experiences of these participants learning of it through older siblings, but not experiencing it themselves. In addition, social media serves as more of a vehicle for bullying to take place and not necessarily a major influence of how to educate children.

Mass media outlets did provide some bullying education through television programs, but did not serve as any more influence than schools. According to Bronfenbrenner’s theory (1979, 1994), media would not necessarily influence the individual directly, but rather influence the
individual by influencing one in the microsystem. For the participants in this study, there is little influence that the media has on children, even through the ecological techno-subsystem (Johnson & Puplampu, 2015). Through this system, individuals are influenced by computerized devices due to face-to-face interaction of the individual and the computer; however, participants of this study were minimally influenced since only 2 out of the 10 students referenced any type of bullying lessons through their experiences.

News media did not serve as a very influential factor in bullying behaviors or as a result of viewing such programs. In actuality, Kay dismissed the credibility of news programs completely and stated that they were not trustworthy to issue bullying suggestions. This is in contrast to literature stating the influence of such programs on children. According to Wilson (2008), children exposed to media consisting of bullying behaviors or of a violent nature can serve as an influential factor, and children are more likely to mimic those behaviors. The data in this study suggests that children are dismissive of traditional media exposure, to the point of not considering it trustworthy or of any purpose. Some participants did reiterate that media lessons on bullying taught them the same suggestions as school, but violence was never discussed or indicated that it was an influencer to behavior in any way.

In addition, evidence from this study contradicts that of Nowland (2015), in which it was suggested that children determine it easier to handle cyber bullying than face-to-face overt bullying. Nowland (2015) suggests that cyber bullying “hurts” less than bullying that takes place in person; however, the evidence of this study did remain consistent that bullies can hide behind the electronic devices. No indication was made that experience with cyber bullying was easier or more difficult to handle than face-to-face bullying. Consequently, Livie shared that the
suggestions she learned from bullying lessons in school and at home were the same that she used in a cyber bullying case that she experienced. Neither was indicated as more detrimental than the other, and both incidents were handled by her and another child witness. In this case, there is little evidence to support the claim that bullying behaviors are easier to handle in one form or the other.

**Implications for Practice**

Participants have learned many strategies on how to handle bullying at school as well as some through the media, which included telling the perpetrator to stop and to report these behaviors to an adult. Building validation in children may provide them with the courage to stand up for themselves or others in a bullying situation without fear of repercussions. Also, if students can better identify bullying, they can decide when adult intervention is necessary. Knowing the difference between a small and big problem, and being able to follow through with appropriate self-defense can be key to building confidence in students; however, this begins with being able to identify behaviors that constitute bullying accurately.

Repeated practice and clarification on bullying is necessary for children to learn to identify bullying, respond appropriately, and not engage in bullying behaviors themselves. Though students expressed that they all receive bullying lessons in school, they shared that this education is provided by guidance counselors and DARE Officers. These resources in schools are valuable; however, they are not repeated and readily available when students have questions or need clarification. Teacher training in bullying behaviors and confidence in telling students how to handle these situations are key to student retention of the subject. Whether experiencing
conflict or bullying, children identify the behavior as bullying. When events happen, teachers should be readily equipped to discuss the experience to help the child. Guidance counselors and DARE officers are extremely beneficial; however, they may not be available at that moment compared to how often the teachers are. Teachers are able to work directly with students and can serve as a student’s first line of defense. As previously stated, some teachers face confusion in the definition and a lack of confidence in providing the best advice for bullying reactions and how to prevent it (Mishna, 2004). Considering suggestions provided by Akiba et al. (2010), it may be helpful for teachers to meet with other teachers, possibly during professional learning communities or grade level meetings, to discuss bullying behaviors specifically, compare bullying data, and share strategies that can be used to address problems within their classrooms.

Providing assistance is valuable since students in this study did illustrate that most of their assistance on bullying comes from those who are not with them every day. If that is the case, Devine et al., (2009) illustrated the importance of teacher influence, which could overpower even that of aggressive familial experiences. Flesheing out the lack of understanding by teachers as well as providing education to them on not just how to handle bullying situations, but building relationships could be crucial in providing them with the strength and education to serve as the line of defense that they are called to do naturally in an educational and social setting.

In Louisiana, school districts are required to provide four hours of bullying training to new staff and two hours for existing employees each school year. These lessons are not specified by the state and can consist of any type of anti-bullying lessons chosen by each district. Teachers’ perceptions of bullying can sometimes confuse conflict and bullying as well, and they experience difficulty in distinguishing bullying behaviors and strategies to assist the students
(Strohmeier & Noam, 2012; Gorsek & Cunningham, 2014). The inability to help a student can be a hindrance to the prevention of bullying in schools. Consistent, repeated direction of how to identify and handle bullying can assist those who are bullied not just at school but in the home environment. The school district in this study must follow Louisiana’s anti-bullying policy; however, it is pertinent to understand how students “tick” or make sense of their world around them to make it effective. To assist with this, providing teachers with knowledge of the conundrum faced by children and their multiple messages, as well as specific professional development to help address it could be beneficial to helping students through the misconceptions and fear presented when involved in bullying.

In addition, it is important to include parental training in bullying in order to help address the confusion felt by the children. If adults understand what is happening to children, they may be more apt to realize the implication it has on them. Parents may also perceive bullying just as children do, as a conflict rather than a true imbalance of power and repeated offense. Educating parents on the true definition will help them in educating their children, especially since through the microsystem parents have shown to be very influential in teaching children how to react to bullying.

It is pertinent as policy makers to consider the conundrum children face in learning to react to bullying. According to Burns, Maycock, Cross, and Brown (2008), students exhibit bullying behaviors for a variety of reasons, such as personality traits, the desire to be labeled part of certain groups, and peer influence. However, knowing how and why students react the way they do is pertinent to address the root of the problem. Including focus groups for those that need assistance going through the multitude of messages and feelings of stress and guilt in their
reactions could help in allowing students to feel that they are not alone, as well as help them to realize that they may be having misconceptions about the possibility of trouble or disappointment they may cause when making decisions on how to handle bullying. Students exhibit increased psychological stress and difficulty adjusting to social situations when bullying is experienced (Donoghue, Almeida, Brandwein, Rocha, & Callahan, 2014). These feelings, compounded with the added pressure of disappointing an adult, can make a difficult situation even more problematic.

**Future Research**

**Research on parental and teacher training.** Future research should be conducted on teacher perceptions of bullying within this particular parish and their confidence level in handling bullying. It is important to determine how much bullying education is being provided by teachers, especially since a teacher can serve as a student’s first line of defense. Following Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system’s theory (1979, 1994), those within the microsystem are the most influential to an individual, especially those who interact with individuals on a regular basis. In this case, though counselors and officers are face-to-face, they are not necessarily meeting with children at a rate that enhances this influence. The teacher could be very influential to the child because of frequent exposure to the student, as well as assisting in identifying behaviors, reporting bullying situations, and making sure that bullying is addressed properly. Consistent bullying education is pertinent for student implementation of anti-bullying strategies.
Finding the root of the parental decision to address the situations the way they do could also be helpful in understanding why they provide specific advice to their children. In addition, determining how effective the bullying lessons are within this participating school district would be beneficial to providing students with strategies to handle conflicting messages. It may also affect the requirement of four hours of teacher training mandated by the state of Louisiana. Bullying will not just “go away.” In some situations, the power differential can be turned on the bully if the victim and witness, preferably more than one, can react together and support the victim through prosocial bystander behavior (Evans & Smokowski, 2015), in which the bystander defends the victim.

**Future research on media influence.** Students of this age did not discuss news programs regarding bullying. However, adults may have more experience in this arena. Future research could be used to determine if parents or school systems are influenced by media outlets and what those implications may be. As children, they did not determine why their parents taught them to react the way they did. Maybe at their age, they just didn’t know. However, since parental influence was a major theme that emerged from this study, it would be pertinent to find the root of the reasons why parents teach their child to react to bullying the way they did.

As educators, we should also study how social media, more than mass media, has an effect on middle school students and older, since some of the participants mentioned cyber bullying in relation to older siblings. This, in turn, did influence how their parents suggested to react to bullying in any form.

**Future research on cultural influences.** Though the research questions of this study did not focus on cultural implications, some developing themes could provide a platform for future
research to understand further perceptions of bullying by children. Through both the draw-and-write section and the interview process, both students of African American decent described the expectation from parents to behave properly at school and not respond to bullying during the school day, but to handle the situation at a later time or different location by either standing up for themselves or some type of retaliation to the bully. In addition, the student of Indian decent had a completely different perspective in that she was to always defend herself at that moment, receiving full support from her parents that self-defense was expected no matter what the setting. According to Ching, McDermott, Fukunga, Yanagida, Mann, and Waldron (1995), in the Japanese culture, a hierarchical system among families is present, in which the father figure controls many decisions within the family while the mother provides support and cooperation of those decisions. It would be interesting to determine how these values, in addition to those of other cultural descent, would have an effect on bullying behaviors and child reactions to bullying based on cultural expectation. This concept could provide a more detailed explanation to further the data gathered within this study.

**Conclusion**

Though this study focused on a selected age of students, it is representative of a larger group who feel that bullying is an uncertainty they face. The position that they are put in when they are a victim of or witness someone else being bullied puts an undisclosed amount of stress on a child; however, having the responsibility to react appropriately compounds the feelings of anxiety. The influences described in ecological systems theory describe how those in the microsystem, which would include both parents and or family, and those in a school environment, have a direct influence on an individual. When handling bullying, those powerful
influences are “battling it out” in the mind of the child. They are trying to make sense of their surroundings to determine the best approach to take with the least amount of negative consequences to follow. Such complexity makes the process of dealing with a bully that much more damaging. Understanding why children react the way they do and providing clarity and understanding to those reactions will make a positive impact on a strenuous situation. From there, positive decisions can be made to address bullying from a completely different perspective: from that of the child.
References


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Appendices
## Appendix A

**Louisiana’s Tesa MiddleBrook Anti-Bullying Policy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prevention:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Develop a definition of bullying. Louisiana definition is as follows:</td>
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<tr>
<td>A pattern of any one or more of the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Gestures, including but not limited to obscene gestures and making faces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Written, electronic, or verbal communication, including but not limited to calling names, threatening harm, taunting, malicious teasing, or spreading untrue rumors. Electronic communication includes but in not limited to a communication or image transmitted by email, instant message, text message, blog, or social networking website through the use of a telephone, mobile phone, pager, computer, or other device.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Physical acts, including but not limited to hitting, kicking, pushing, tripping, choking, damaging personal property, or unauthorized use of personal property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Repeatedly and purposefully shunning or excluding from activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 2: Implement 4 hours of mandated teacher and staff training on bullying and its effects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Implement 1 hour training of students orally and in writing, regarding the prohibition against bullying, including the definition, consequences, and procedures for reporting bullying. A copy of this notice should be sent to parents and returned with a parent’s signature.</td>
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<th>Intervention and Reporting:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Step 1: A verbal report to the principal must be made on the same day the incident was witnessed or reported. A formal, written report must be submitted to the principal within 2 days thereafter.</td>
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<td>Step 2: The principal will initiate an investigation not later than the next business day following the report of the incident.</td>
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<td>Step 3: Interviews with the victim, perpetrator, and witness shall be conducted. An interview cannot be conducted without first giving the parents of each the opportunity to attend the interview.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 4: The principal will use all proper investigation forms, including witness forms.</td>
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<td>Step 5: The investigation must be completed within 10 business days following the initial report.</td>
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<td>Step 6: A determination must be made, and consequences can then be given based on findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 7: The principal must notify the parents of the victim and the perpetrators of the findings, and a formal summary report must be written and placed in both students’ cumulative file.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Draw and Write Interview

Draw a picture of a bullying situation. It can be a real situation that has happened to you, something you have seen, or just what you imagine bullying to be like.

Be sure to label yourself and others.
Tell me about what is going on in your picture (researcher writes responses)

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Why did you act like you did?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Where did you learn this behavior?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
Appendix C

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

1. Tell me in your own words what bullying means.

2. Have you ever seen bullying in school?
   What happened?

3. Describe the times you have been involved in or witnessed bullying (can include the situation you drew).
   Why did you act the way you did?
   If you had a chance to do it all over again, would you?

4. What are good rules for children to follow when they experience bullying?
   If you could teach other kids about bullying and how to handle it, or stop it, what would you teach them?

5. Did you ever learn about bullying at school? If so, what did you learn?
   Did you use this information in any bullying situation? How?

6. Do you ever speak to your parents or family about bullying and if so, what did you learn from that?
   Did they ever speak to you about bullying?
Did you ever use this information in any bullying situation? How?

7. Did you ever learn about bullying from the Internet or television? If so, what outlets did this come from? (Social media sites, news, television campaigns—clarification on these may be given)

What did this mean to you?

Do you ever use the information you learned from the Internet or TV? How?

8. When learning about bullying, did you ever get the same information from school, home, and media? If so, what was that?

Did any of these people/things provide you with different information about bullying?

9. Can you think of a time that you experienced bullying and used some of what you’ve learned?

10. Can you think of a time that you experienced bullying and you didn’t know what to do?

11. If you were the principal of your school, what would you do to prevent bullying?
Appendix D

Bullying Survey

Student Name:________________________________

Please circle one:

Age: 8 9 10

Gender: boy girl

Race: ________ (this may be retrieved from JPAMS)

Directions: This survey is to help us learn about your experiences with bullying at school. Please fill out the survey the best you can.

Place a checkmark if you have ever been…

_______ teased or called mean names

_______ embarrassed by someone on purpose

_______ hit, tripped, or hurt on purpose by someone

_______ made fun of because of the way you look

_______ left out or wasn’t allowed to play with someone

_______ afraid of being beat up

_______ treated badly or made fun of on social media (ex. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat)

_______ treated badly on email

Place a checkmark if you have ever been…

_______ called a bully

_______ punished for bullying someone (whether you did bully or not)

_______ teased the same person more than once

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______ hit, tripped, or kicked the same person more than once

Place a checkmark if you have ever….

______ seen someone being bullied
______ reported bullying to a teacher or adult
______ learned about bullying at school
______ talked about bullying with your family or parents
______ watched something on television that talked about bullying
______ learned about bullying from the internet or cell phone

Do you have anything else you would like to share with us about bullying?

Please write it here

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

A research project is being conducted on bullying in elementary students. If you could, would you be interested in being interviewed for the project? If you check yes, it does not mean you WILL be chosen, it just means that you may be interested in participating.

______ YES   ______ NO

Thank you so much for your help!
Appendix E

Vita

The author was born in Houma, Louisiana. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from Nicholls State University in 1999. She began teaching elementary education in Lafourche Parish while pursuing a Master’s degree in Administration and Supervision. She completed this degree in 2002. She then attended Nicholls State University again to obtain 30 graduate hours specializing in curriculum and completed a reading specialist certification. In 2008, she became the Assistant Principal of an elementary school where she still remains today. In 2013, she entered the Educational Administration Doctoral Program at the University of New Orleans to pursue her Doctorate of Philosophy. She completed her Doctorate in December, 2016.