

2015

# Perceptions of Middle School Bystanders to Bullying Incidences

Elizabeth Walden Beasley  
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Walden University  
2015

Abstract

Perceptions of Middle School Bystanders to Bullying Incidences

by

Elizabeth Walden Beasley

MEd, Bowie State University

BS, Illinois State University

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

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## Abstract

Bullying permeates all grade levels in schools. Despite antibullying initiatives implemented in a Midwest school district, bullying continued to occur. One aspect of bullying that is not often examined is the perceptions of bystanders, especially at the middle school level. The purposes of this quantitative survey design study were to examine (a) the frequency and level of bullying by grade level, (b) the relationship between middle school bystanders' willingness to intervene and grade level, and (c) perceptions of bullying interventions and grade level. Latané and Darley's bystander effect theory was the theoretical framework for this study. Descriptive statistics and chi-square analysis were used to examine survey data from 548 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders who reported being bullied or observed bullying at school. Descriptive statistics results were that the majority of students were bullied occasionally (6<sup>th</sup> grade 57%, 7<sup>th</sup> grade 63%, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade 57%), while a smaller group of students (6<sup>th</sup> grade 22%, 7<sup>th</sup> grade 20%, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade 25%) were bullied every day. Chi square results indicated there was no significant relationship between bystanders' willingness to intervene in bullying situations and their grade level. Furthermore, there was a significant relationship between students' perceptions regarding impact of intervening for Grades 6 and 8, but not for Grade 7. It was concluded that, within this particular group, bullying was occurring in unsupervised areas in middle school, and few students were reporting an intent to help a student being bullied, despite their perceptions that intervening would be effective. It is recommended that students receive bystander intervention training that may reduce bullying. This endeavor may contribute to positive social change by providing bystander students with the skills necessary to intervene in incidences of bullying to reduce bullying in schools.

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## Section 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

The topic of bullying has dominated discussions in schools and on the news in recent years. Bullying permeates all grade levels in schools (Graham, 2011; Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010; Yerger & Gehret, 2011). Following school shootings or other school violence, it is often revealed that the actions of the perpetrators stemmed from having been bullied themselves by peers in school. Most states and individual school districts have included antibullying measures and mandatory disciplinary actions in their policies (Yerger & Gehret, 2011).

Not only is bullying reported in the news and addressed in public schools, the scientific research on bullying is abundant. Researchers have indicated that bullying in schools is a problem that merits the attention of school leaders (Sela-Shayovitz, 2011; Swearer et al., 2010; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011). School leaders have been seeking ways to decrease bullying while increasing student achievement (Boulton, 2008). In schools where bullying is tolerated, students find it difficult to learn; bullying can damage the climate of an entire school (Gendron, Williams, & Guerra, 2011). When the climate of a school is damaged, students are not available for learning.

Since the April 1999 shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado, educators have done a more efficient job of protecting their students from outsiders who may wish to do them harm (Darden, 2008; Dysart, 2008; Milner, 2007). Before an individual is hired to work in a school system, background checks are conducted. School volunteers

or parents wishing to go on a field trip with their children must also have background checks before working in a school (Miners, 2007). Additionally, many schools now have all visitors sign in through the main office. Other security measures include locked school doors and an increased use of security cameras (Armenta & Stader, 2011). School leaders have made security a priority.

However, to allow all students to feel safe at school, school leaders must also be as diligent in protecting their students from one another. Society must also intervene to put a stop to bullying. Olweus (1993), who has studied bullying in schools, asked, “How willing is our society to change this reality, so painful for so many students, in a more positive direction?” (p. 128). Society has an obligation to intervene when it becomes aware of cruelties to its fellow human, and this includes schools as well.

In my local school system, bullying has been a topic of interest since the Maryland State Department of Education began requiring each school to report all incidents of bullying. Parents, students, or any person familiar with a student being bullied or harassed can request a reporting form at every school or obtain one on each school’s website. The allegations of bullying must then be investigated by a school administrator. All information regarding the investigation is then shared with the local board of education. The data from all schools in the local school district are then reported to the state board of education.

Despite the local school system’s antibullying initiatives, bullying continues to occur. One aspect of bullying that has not been examined is the perceptions of

bystanders while students are bullied. Using Latané and Darley's bystander effect theory, the purpose of this quantitative survey design study was to examine the frequency and level of bullying and the relationship between middle school bystanders' willingness to intervene and perceptions of bullying intervention and grade level.

### **Problem Statement**

Bullying exists at all grade levels in schools (Liu & Graves, 2011). Bullying is causing harm to another person, which can include mental, emotional, or physical harm by continued teasing or calling names (Kennedy, Russom, & Kevorkian, 2012). An imbalance of power is also usually present (Carrera, DePalma, & Lameiras, 2011). Bullying tends to increase during middle school, peaking around age 12, and then generally decreases steadily (Austin, Reynolds, & Barnes, 2012). Bullying is a pervasive problem with nearly 1 in five students admitting to bullying others (Cole, Cornell, & Sheras, 2006). Nationally, 10% to 15% of students reported being chronically bullied in school (Graham, 2011). Bullying is a concern for many school age children especially those in the middle grades.

Bullies and those whom they bully have also been studied in-depth. Children who are bullied often have difficulty with relationships and suffer from low self-esteem as adults (Flaspohler, Elfstrom, Vanderzee, Sink, & Birchmeier, 2009; Gourneau, 2012). Both bullies and those who are bullied are at risk of developing psychiatric disorders in adulthood (O'Brennan, Bradshaw, & Sawyer, 2009). The mental health concerns that adults could be a result of bullying that occurred in childhood.

While the negative aspects of being bullied are evident, one aspect of bullying that has not been examined are the perceptions of bystanders while students are bullied. Bystanders are those who are present with the bully and the victim at the time of the bullying (McGrath, 2007). Bystanders are present in incidences of reported bullying ranging from 63% to 85% of the time (Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009); thus, the importance of bystanders is undeniable. Bystanders are important when bullying occurs. The role of the bystander can be changed, and this may end the cycle of bullying (Rodkin, 2011).

Bullying occurs most often when adults are not present (Kennedy, Russom, & Kevorkian, 2012). For that reason alone, peer bystanders have a greater opportunity to intervene than anyone else. The bystander has a choice to make. The bystander could remain silent and, therefore, unintentionally encourage the bully to continue bullying, or the bystander may choose to join the bully in the victimization. Lastly, the bystander could also choose to intervene by defending the victim or discouraging the behavior of the bully. By helping the victim of bullying, the bystander may help alleviate the feelings of despair that the victim may feel (Flaspohler et al., 2009; Gourneau, 2012). The goal of the current study was to examine bullying in middle schools and its relationship to the bystanders who witness bullying situations. If bullying is no longer considered the norm, there may be fewer incidences of bullying, or it might even be eliminated (Dracic, 2009; Young et al., 2009).

This study was an attempt to further elaborate on and clarify the link between bystanders and incidents of bullying. I examined archival data from an anonymous survey administered in a middle school to determine if students had been bullied in school, what differences exist in the perceptions of bystanders in regard to how problematic bullying is for themselves and others, how willing bystanders are to intervene, and whether students believe bullies will change their behavior. I explored students' perceptions of bullying, their willingness to intervene, and whether there was a relationship between students' intervention in bullying and their belief that the intervention will stop the bullying. The independent variables were the participants' gender and grades; the dependent variables were the differences in the participants' perceptions regarding bullying and their willingness to intervene in a bullying situation.

### **The Nature of the Study**

This study was quantitative methodology with a descriptive survey design. I examined bystander intervention in situations of bullying in a middle school in southern Maryland. The results of a survey administered to students in Grades 6, 7, and 8 were examined. In the fall of 2010, teachers in one middle school administered the survey at the request of the principal (Appendix A). The survey was administered as a needs assessment for the school. The principal was seeking information about the social climate of the school and the effect of bullying on the school. There were 548 middle school students from the study site who participated in the survey. The independent variables were the participants' grade levels; the dependent variables were the differences

in the participants' perceptions regarding bullying and their willingness to intervene in a bullying situation. The methodology of the study will be discussed in more detail in Section 3.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The study was designed to answer the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ 1a: What is the frequency of receiving bullying as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 1b: What is the frequency of receiving bullying by location as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 2a: What is the frequency of witnessing bullying as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 2b: What is the frequency of witnessing bullying by location as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 3: What is the level of the bullying problem as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 4: What is the level of the bullying problem for others as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 5: What is the relationship between students' willingness to intervene and their grade level?

*H5<sub>0</sub>*: No significant relationship exists between students' willingness to intervene in bullying situations and their grade level.

*H5<sub>a</sub>*: A significant relationship exists between students' willingness to intervene in bullying situations and their grade level.

RQ 6: What is the relationship between students' perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level?

*H6<sub>0</sub>*: No significant relationship exists between perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level.

*H6<sub>a</sub>*: A significant relationship exists between perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the frequency and level of bullying and the relationship between middle school bystanders' willingness to intervene and their perceptions of intervening in situations of bullying by grade level. Bystanders provide an audience to the bully. The bully is not acting in a vacuum; onlookers can encourage the bully to continue simply by being present (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012). During incidences of bullying, some bystanders do not assist victims of bullying but rather provide positive reinforcement to the bully. This was the case in 75% of the observed events in O'Connell, Pepler, and Craig's (1999) study. Sometimes students may join in the bullying or verbally encourage the bully, but the silence of bystanders can be still be seen as an encouragement to the bully rather than support for the bullied. Ignoring

bullying gives the bullies the permission to continue (Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011).

Researchers continue to support intervention and stress the negative implications of a lack of intervention (Kennedy, Russom, & Kevorkian, 2012; Salmivalli et al., 2011; Yerger & Gehret, 2011). Intervention by bystanders is necessary if school leaders and their stakeholders desire to produce healthy, well-adjusted adults. The implications of not intervening can be serious; the public was reminded of this with the release of the writings, videotapes, and artwork the perpetrator of the Virginia Tech shootings produced (Hauser, 2007). Bullied students do not necessarily strike out at others to cause them harm. They often suppress their frustration and pain and may cause harm to themselves. The negative effects on students can reach far into adulthood. Bullied students often suppress their frustration and pain and may cause harm to themselves. Adults who were bullied as children may abuse substances or even commit suicide to dull or end their pain (Min, Catalano, Haggerty, & Abbott, 2011). Bullying may lead to problems when the student reaches adulthood; he or she may have difficulty in relationships because of feelings of low self-worth (Sesar, Barišić, Pandža, & Dodaj, 2012). Again, the bullying that children experience may have a negative effect when these children become adults.

### **Theoretical Base**

According to the bystander effect, when there are other people present, the chances are less likely that anyone will intervene in an emergency (Latané & Darley, 1970). Researchers first developed the theory of the bystander effect after conducting

numerous studies on the behavior of bystanders (Latané & Darley, 1970; Latané & Rodin, 1969). The bystander effect can be applied in instances of bullying. When bullying occurs in schools, bystanders are generally present (Polanin et al., 2012). Whether or not bystanders intervene in incidences of bullying was the focus of the current study.

Incidents of bullying generally occur with bystanders present (Craig & Pepler, 1995; Rivers et al., 2009), but the experiences of bystanders to bullying have not been researched across the United States nor in my local setting. The forms used to report bullying in the state of Maryland do not include information about bystanders or witnesses (Maryland State Department of Education, 2011, p. 23). Assessing the perceptions of bystanders to bullying in schools can provide information to encourage bystanders to intervene.

### **Operational Definitions**

To establish a common understanding, it is necessary to provide definitions for terms and concepts used in the study.

*Bullying:* For the purposes of this study, bullying included negative actions such as “words (threatening, calling nasty names, other forms of verbal harassment), physical contact (hitting, punching, kicking, pinching), other ways (making faces, dirty gestures, exclusion from the group, refusing to comply with another pupil’s wishes)” (Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004, p. 84).

*Bystanders:* Anyone present when bullying occurred, besides the bully or the bullied.

*The bystander effect:* When there were other people present, the chances were less likely that anyone would intervene in an emergency (Latané & Darley, 1970).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

In this study, it was assumed that students understand the definition of bullying and recognize bullying behavior when they witness it. Another assumption was that students understood the questions they were answering on the Bullying Survey (Appendix A). It was also assumed that students were honest in their responses to the survey about witnessing bullying and intervening in bullying situations.

#### **Limitations**

This study was limited to survey responses of students in Grades 6-8 who were enrolled in a middle school in Maryland; therefore, the findings may not be applicable to other middle schools. The responses on the survey were limited to the descriptions of bullying that were included in the Bullying Survey (Appendix A). In addition, not all teachers chose to have their classes participate in answering the survey; participation was left to the discretion of each social studies teacher. Social studies teachers administered the survey.

The first limitation of the research design was that the results might not be generalizable to the population of middle school students in any other schools. The

sample was only students at one middle school. Another limitation was that the data collected were based on archival data from a survey that had not been piloted or tested and validated. A final limitation of the research design was that the survey only contained the participants' grade; no further demographic information was gathered.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The study was delimited to students in Grades 6-8 in one southern Maryland middle school. The pool of participants was the students in Grades 6-8 whose teachers agreed to administer the survey. The survey was delimited to students enrolled in social studies class because all students in the school are enrolled in social studies. The survey was deemed necessary by the school principal to provide information about the school's climate.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because most research regarding bystanders has been conducted in countries other than the United States (Frisen et al., 2007; Rivers & Noret, 2010; Rivers et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2007). Although studies conducted in other countries could be generalized to the United States, research must be conducted in the United States to provide data about schools in this country.

A lack of studies exists on the attitudes of bystanders in relation to bullying situations. If bystanders believe their actions can have an effect of bullying and, in turn, intervene, bullies may no longer bully others. This study of the role of bystanders will help fill the gap that exists in the current literature. Some researchers have suggested that

the idea of the bystander effect is so prevalent in literature that it may have hindered further research (Manning, Levine & Collins, 2007). In this study, I expanded on research on the bystander and the bystander effect during incidences of bullying in schools.

This study has the potential to be significant to school leaders, teachers, and students. Research must be conducted to provide school leaders with information about the state of their schools in regard to bullying. In addition, through this study, teachers may be provided with further education about their role in ending bullying. Leaders must have the skills to understand what their teachers need to succeed and to provide education to the teachers in their schools (Marshall, Varjas, Meyers, Graybill, & Skoczylas, 2009). This study will be significant to school leaders because it can give them insight into how they can change the climate of their schools to one where students do not allow their classmates to bully one another.

To change the culture of schools and society, perhaps all it will take is for one person to decide he or she will no longer tolerate mistreatment of others. Bystanders have the power to transform society if they choose to send a message that bullying is wrong and must stop. Social change may occur when bystanders decide to intervene in bullying situations. Bullies may realize that bullying is behavior that is unacceptable to others, and they will no longer be allowed to demonstrate this behavior.

### **Transition Statement**

Bullying is a problem in schools, both locally and nationally. How to solve that problem is a concern for school leaders and society. Latané and Darley's (1970) theory of the bystander effect was used to frame the current study. Bystanders may be an important part of solving the problem of bullying. A quantitative study is an appropriate research design to examine the relationships between the independent and the dependent variables defined in the study.

Through a review of the literature in Section 2, the importance of bystanders in incidences of bullying, as well as their effect on bullying, is clear. This review includes an examination of recent studies about bullying, the effect of bullying in schools, the role of school personnel, the role of bystanders, and ways bystanders could be encouraged to intervene. Recommendations from current literature are also included. In Section 3, I describe the methodology of the study that I used to examine the bystander in incidences of bullying. In Section 4 of the study, I will report the findings including the data analyses. Section 5 will be the summary and interpretation of findings, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further study.

## Section 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

In order for bullying to be stopped, a school culture must be cultivated that encourages peers to look out for one another. If school staff does not encourage students to look out for one another, bullying will continue to be a part of schools. As long as school staff reacts to bullying by doing nothing, it will remain a part of schools (Rodkin, 2011). Stopping bullying in schools will not be easy because it has long been the prevailing sentiment among many adults, including teachers, that bullying is just a rite of passage that children must endure (Graham, 2011). The sentiment that “kids will be kids” dismisses and excuses the unacceptable and cruel behavior of some children toward their peers. Bullying can be harmful to the bully, the bullied, and the bystander (Arseneault, Bowes, & Shakoor, 2009). Because it can damage all those who are involved in an incidence of bullying, it should be addressed. If children are not learning positive ways to cope with bullying, society could then be compromised because these children may become adults who are unable to cope (Sourander et al., 2009). School leaders must send the message that bullying is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Bullying cannot be the norm and should not be considered the norm (Graham, 2011). There is no reason that bullying has to be a part of growing up.

In this section, the current literature about bullying and bystanders is reviewed. Part of the literature review revolves around the research variables of this study. The independent variables were the participants’ gender and grades; the dependent variables

were the participants' differences in their perceptions regarding bullying and their willingness to intervene in a bullying situation. Literature regarding the negative implications of bullying as well as information about legislation that addresses bullying is included. The impact of bullying on the school climate is discussed. Literature about the effects that teachers and other school personnel have on bullying as well as the literature about school discipline policies is reviewed. Teaching bystanders to intervene is discussed. A review of the literature relating to research methods is also included.

### **Research Strategy**

References that support the study were obtained using various methods. To research the topic of bystanders, I gathered information through the online databases Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest, SAGE Journals online, and Ebsco Academic Search Premiere through the Walden University library. The parameters of the search initially included all dates to include seminal research on bullying. I later narrowed it down to research studies from the last 5 years. Words and phrases searched included but were not limited to *bullying*, *bystander*, *bystander effect*, *middle school*, *adolescent violence*, *adolescent bullying*, *teacher perceptions bullying*, *adolescent perceptions bullying*, and *adolescent aggression*.

### **Negative Implications of Bullying**

Childhood bullying may have far-reaching effects on the mental health of those who were bullied even in adulthood. Those who were bullied as children have long-term high levels of anxiety. There is no difference in the length of time the bullying

continued; anxiety continues into adulthood even if students were bullied for a short period of time. (Van Oort, Greaves-Lord, Ormel, Verhulst, & Huizink, 2011). Those who are bullied have a lower self-esteem and have greater social anxiety and feelings of peer rejection and withdrawal (Karna, Voeten, Poskiparta, & Salmivalli, 2010; Menesini, Modena, & Tani, 2009). Those who are bullied are more depressed than their peers (Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2007).

Students who were bullies or bullied are more likely to receive psychiatric treatment and/or be prescribed psychiatric drugs. In a Finnish study that followed children from age 8 until age 24, Sourander et al. (2009) indicated that psychiatric hospitalization and use of psychiatric drugs, including antipsychotic, antidepressants, and anxiolytic drugs, could be predicted at age 8 at least for female students who were victims of bullying. This situation does not imply that bullying causes individuals to require psychiatric treatment, but that there is a likelihood that girls who are bullied may seek psychiatric help or medication.

High school age females who are bullied are more likely to abuse alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana and exhibit signs of depression. High school males do not abuse substances more when they are bullied, but they do report depression (Luk, 2010, p. 355). Those who are bullied while in school report that they had also been involved in fighting or had suicidal ideation (Cheng et al., 2010). Those who were bullied in school participate in risk taking behaviors.

Victims of bullying feel more stress and are more dissatisfied with their lives. Bullied students do not feel supported at school and consider their relationships, both in and out of school, to be stressful (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2007). Students are bullied about attributes over which they have no control, such as receiving special education services, sexual orientation, race, looks, or body shape (Levin, 2011). They experience more loneliness than their same-age peers (Estevez, 2009, p. 473) and are shyer with fewer friends than those who were not bullied (Arseneault et al., 2009). It is unclear whether these feelings were caused by the bullying or if students who experienced those emotions were the students who were targeted by bullies. These negative feelings of the bullied students can be alleviated somewhat when bystanders defend the victim (Gourneau, 2012). Conversely, these feelings can be exacerbated when bystanders reinforce the bully (Karna et al., 2010).

Not only may victims suffer emotionally from being bullied, they may also lash out at others. Gangs are often comprised of individuals who were victims of bullying. Students who are repeatedly bullied by their classmates are more likely to join a gang to seek protection or acceptance (Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, & Brick, 2010). This then leads to further problems for the bullied student, such as suspensions from school and involvement in the judicial system.

Following the April 1999 violence at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, the U.S. Secret Service and the Department of Education conducted a research study that was published in 2002. The study examined 37 incidences of school violence

from 1974-2000. Other incidences of school violence were not included if the attackers were no longer living. This was the first time that this type of information about school shootings had been gathered into one study. The study included interviews with 41 attackers as well as other students who attended the schools involved in the incidences of violence. One school shooter was referred to as “the kid everyone teased” (Fein et al., 2002, p. 27). When these school shooters were interviewed, 71% of those students stated that they had been bullied in school. The perpetrators of school violence in this study reported having been severely bullied and harassed over a long period of time (Fein et al., 2002). The students interviewed stated that they considered their violence to be retribution for the suffering they had endured at the hands of bullies. They felt justified in what they had done and that the bullies deserved to be harmed.

Although there are few studies conducted about school shootings, Reuter and Rice (2008) interviewed one school shooter who remained anonymous to all but the researchers when the study was published. The school shooter was referred to in the study only as John. John reported having been bullied nearly every day at school. He had been doing well in school until his family moved. But after the move, his grades dropped, and his general attitude and demeanor changed. He was suddenly in trouble at home and at school. He stated that he had hoped someone would ask him why things had changed, and then maybe someone could help to stop him from what he was planning. “No one ever asked, and no one ever made him accountable for the changes they saw in him” (Reuter & Rice, 2008, p. 356). After 6 months of bullying, John took a gun to

school. His plan was to die at school that day; instead, he killed two people but was only injured himself. He is now serving life in prison. John had hoped that someone would intervene in his life. It could have been any of the bystanders to the bullying he had experienced. It could have been a teacher, an administrator, or a classmate. Lack of intervention may lead others to make the same choices that John made.

Witnessing bullying can have a negative effect on bystanders. Students report distress at witnessing bullying repetitively (Janson, Carney, Hazler, & Oh, 2009). A student who is a witness to bullying has a propensity for mental health issues (Rivers et al., 2009). This holds true even if the observer had never personally been bullied, but had merely witnessed it. In a questionnaire of 2,002 students in the United Kingdom, students who were either bullies or witnessed others being bullied had higher rates of substance abuse and mental health concerns than either those who had never been involved in a bullying incident or those who were victims of bullying (Rivers et al., 2009). However, the questionnaire did not address whether or not the students in the sample had pre-existing mental health issues. This scenario indicates that being both bullied and being a bystander could lead to risk taking behaviors and psychiatric issues.

### **Legislation to Address Bullying**

In the past, if bullying was addressed, it was addressed in the schools using the discipline code of the individual school systems; now it is also addressed using the legal system (Yerger & Gehret, 2011). Part of the definition of bullying generally involves an imbalance of power (Smith et al., 2004), but this balance can be changed by the

implementation of laws and statutes (Dayton & Dupre, 2009). The legal system can give power to the bullied students that they may not have known they had.

Only within the last decade have nearly all states added bullying to their administrative codes or laws in some form. In 2002, it became mandatory under the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Community Act that each state and school district addresses bullying in schools (U.S. Congress, 2002; Yerger & Gehret, 2011). The way that each state chooses to address bullying is left to the lawmakers of each state who then decide how each school district will manage bullying. For example, the state of Maryland has linked bullying and harassment in its legislation (School Safety, Code of Maryland Regulations § 03 *et seq.*, 2005). The code states that all students are entitled to a safe education, free from any harassment for any reason.

The passage of The Safe Schools Act of 2005 added more requirements for reporting bullying, but again left it to the individual states how to implement the requirements. For example, each school in Maryland is required to report incidences of bullying to their local boards of education (Maryland State Department of Education, 2011). Reports of bullying are made in each school using the Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting form (Maryland State Department of Education, 2011). Parents, students, or any individuals close to a student may submit the forms. Using this data, a report is then made to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). In the 2009-2010 school year, 3,818 cases of bullying were reported to MSDE (Maryland State Department of Education, 2011). In the local school system, there were 3.8 formal

reports of bullying for every 1,000 enrolled students (Maryland State Department of Education, 2011). In a survey conducted statewide of 1,644 high school students, 20.9% of those students surveyed reported having been bullied at school (Maryland State Department of Education, 2011).

Even before antibullying laws were passed, school systems could be sued for not addressing bullying. When bringing lawsuits against school systems, some individuals who are bullied in school or the parents of those who are bullied have chosen to use laws that have been in effect for many years rather than using antibullying laws. Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 states that “No persons in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity” (20 U.S.C. § 1681). Lawyers for victims of bullying have argued both successfully and unsuccessfully that bullying can be considered a form of discrimination (Sacks & Salem, 2009).

Another law that is not specifically an antibullying law but has been used by students who are bullied to bring lawsuits against school districts is the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). IDEA guarantees students who have disabilities the right to a “free and appropriate education” (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.). When students are bullied, they tend to miss school and, therefore, miss receiving the education that is their right. Parents of students bringing lawsuits against school districts have won the right for their children to attend other schools at the original school district’s expense; they have not received monetary awards (Sacks & Salem, 2009). Bullying can not only be harmful to

those involved in bullying, it can also have a negative impact on school systems who must then go to court to prove they were not negligent in not protecting students from bullying.

### **Bullying and School Climate**

It is the responsibility of school leaders to provide a safe and orderly learning environment. Bullying can have a profound effect on the climate of a school. In schools where students deem the climate as positive, students report there are few incidences of bullying (Gendron, Williams, & Guerra, 2011; Rhodes, Camic, Milburn, & Lowe, 2009). If students believe their teachers and administrators care about them and that rules are enforced fairly, they tend to not bully others (Correia & Dalbert, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010, p. 494). The climate of the school may not allow children to feel safe and comfortable enough themselves at school to help others. It is the duty of the school administrator to ensure every student finds school a place that is safe and supportive (National Middle School Association, 2010). This would imply that bullying would not be a part of the school environment. In a questionnaire administered to the leaders of 13 school districts, 75% of administrators felt that they were able to discourage bullying in their schools (Perkins, 2007).

Teachers believe that they can improve the climate of the school by collaboration with school administrators (Rhodes, Camic, Milburn, & Lowe, 2009). However, indicators of a poor school climate such as high student-teacher ratio, high rates of student poverty, high suspension rates, and student mobility are factors that may predict higher levels of

bullying but are difficult to change (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2009). Middle school administrators and teachers often manage these factors less well and also have higher levels of reported bullying than elementary and high schools (Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & Sawyer, 2007; McKenna, Hawk, Mullen, 2011). Incidences of bullying are more prevalent in larger schools (Arseneault, 2010, p. 720); larger schools often have a perceived negative climate (Chen & Weikart, 2008).

School climate is one factor in predicting whether bullying exists in a school. If school leaders stress that bullying is not acceptable and that showing concern for others is, then the climate of the school can change. It can become the norm to be kind to others. Everyone must work together to end harassment, verbal abuse, bullying, and name calling (National Middle School Association, 2010). The building principal must show leadership and send a strong message that will improve the school climate.

### **Teachers' Ability to Address Bullying**

Although teachers may express concern for students who are bullied by others, they feel they may not have the ability to properly address bullying in their classes. Teachers are not sufficiently prepared for dealing with bullying when they are in college because of a rush to graduate teachers to fill critical teaching positions (Conoley, 2008). Teachers report a desire to receive more professional development in ways to combat bullying in their classrooms (Kennedy, Russom, & Kevorkian, 2012; Marshall, Varjas, Meyers, Graybill, & Skoczylas, 2009). Teachers should be provided with more in-service activities to be educated about bullying and its negative effects (Sahin, 2010).

Some of these skills may not come naturally to teachers, but more training could be provided by the school counselor or school psychologist to improve teachers' skills to make them more aware of bullying when it occurs.

Because of their lack of training in dealing with bullying in their classrooms, teachers often let students determine the climate of the classroom rather than setting the tone themselves (Conoley, 2008). It is important that school leaders examine who has the power in the classroom (Bansel, Davies, Laws, & Linnell, 2009). Children learn what we teach them, and teachers must be careful what lesson they are teaching.

To prevent bullying in the classroom, teachers should strive to development meaningful relationships with their students. Students need to feel a connection with the adults in their schools. Positive relationships between students and teachers are associated with schools that have less bullying (Gendron, Williams, & Guerra, 2011). If students believe their teachers and administrators care about them and that rules are enforced fairly, they tend to not bully others (Correia & Dalbert, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010). Relationships can change a school for the better or worse depending on the quality of those relationships (Yablon, 2010). In classrooms where students feel supported by their teachers, bullying is reduced (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010). Teachers should also consider grouping victims with students who will treat them kindly so that they can be successful in social relationships with their peers (Conoley, 2008). All students can benefit from using taught stress management techniques, and teachers can remind students to use these techniques (Cheng et al., 2010).

The classroom management of the teachers has an influence on the prevalence of bullying in the classroom (Rowan, 2007). Bullying rarely occurs when a teacher's classroom discipline is considered by his or her students to be consistent and fair. In classrooms where the teachers' classroom discipline is considered inconsistent or unfair, more bullying occurs (Rowan, 2007). The bully and the bullied should believe that teachers will follow the same steps every time an incident of bullying is witness or reported.

If students are actively engaged in classroom activities and teachers are aware of any negative interactions between students, there is little time or opportunity for bullying to occur during class (Crothers & Kolbert, 2008). Bullying occurs when students are unmonitored or are involved in unstructured activities (Kennedy, Russom, & Kevorkian, 2012). Teachers should be aware of what is happening in the classroom. Teachers can remain involved in the classroom by proximity control rather than maintaining a distance from the class by sitting at his or her desk while students are working.

Teachers must also model the behavior that bullying is unacceptable. However, how teachers respond to bullying in their classrooms varies greatly from teacher to teacher. Teachers who believe bullying is a serious issue that may have serious implications for the bullied student tend to intervene more when bullying among their students is brought to their attention (Allen, 2010). Teachers who do not believe bullying is serious may not intervene.

Teachers and students often view bullying differently and do not use the same words to describe it. When students discuss bullying, they do not consider “social exclusion” as bullying; however, adults consider this to be another form of bullying (Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, de Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006). It is important for teachers to discuss the actual behavior rather than simply refer to the behavior as bullying. It is important to remember that the most authentic view of bullying comes from students rather than the adults in building (Naylor et al., 2006).

### **Bullying and Other School Personnel**

Besides teachers and school administrators, other adults at school such as bus drivers, speech language pathologists, and school nurses are in a position to address bullying. All adults who encounter students can be involved by addressing bullying when it occurs.

Bullying regularly occurs on the school bus. In a study of bus drivers, deLara (2008) found that 70% of bus drivers reported bullying and other aggression on their buses. The drivers said they intervened to stop bullying on a daily basis. Bus drivers who noticed bullying on their buses observed “verbal bullying, psychological intimidation, physical bullying, fights, and sexual harassment” (deLara, 2008, p. 57). Verbal bullying was the most common with 90% of drivers observing that behavior. If bus drivers are not comfortable directly addressing bullying when it occurs on their buses, they should report any incidences of bullying to the school administrators.

Speech language pathologists are also in a position to address bullying. Students with speech and language disabilities can be the targets of bullying behavior. Bullies tease fellow students about their shyness, stuttering, or inability to find the right word at the right time (Blood, Boyle, Blood, & Nalesnik, 2010). Speech-language pathologists who work with these students have the opportunity to develop a rapport that allows the students to feel comfortable enough to share their experiences of being bullied. In one study, speech-language pathologists reported that they do not intervene in bullying, so further in-service training should include them, as well ("Speech-language pathologists positioned to help victims of bullying," 2011).

The school nurse may serve as a counselor to the students who may or may not be physically ill, but still are asking for the attention of adults. Students who are bullied often report physical ailments and report to the health room at school (Willis & Griffith, 2010). School nurses are "in an exceptional position to ask the tough questions" (Reuter & Rice, 2008, p. 358). Students view school nurses as approachable (Trueland, 2012). Nurses generally speak with students privately and are able to speak with candor. Students will talk to nurses when they might not feel comfortable with other adults in the building (Kvarme, Helseth, Saetern, & Natvig, 2010; Willis & Griffith, 2010).

The importance of the school nurse is undeniable. Students may report that they have been bullied or report that classmates are being bullied (Liu & Graves, 2011). Because nurses are not required to maintain confidentiality for issues that are not health

related, they are then able to share information with parents, teachers, and school administrators that they may not otherwise know about.

### **Bullying and Parents**

Although bullying is prevalent in schools, 88% of parents believe their child is safe at school (Holt, Kantor, & Finkelhor, 2009). Researchers have suggested that schools are “relatively safe places” (Ashford, 2008, p. 230). However, students who are bullied at school report that they have stressful relationships at home (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2007). These students feel they have nowhere to turn if they are faced with stress both at home and at school. Students who are bullied often do not have coping skills and are not resilient; stressors at home and school may become unbearable. Students who report feeling supported at home by their parents and their siblings report that they are bullied less at school. These students feel happy at home and at school if they believe their parents understand their feelings (Cheng et al., 2010).

Victims of bullying often have parents who are considered punitive; they tend to punish rather than discipline (Shetgiri, Lin, Avila, & Flores, 2012). If students are severely punished at home, they are not resilient and unable to cope when bullied at school. They tend to handle problems emotionally rather than logically and tend to internalize any negative interactions. They may then exhibit negative behaviors in school leading to more disciplinary actions. Students are less likely to bully or be bullied if the parenting skills are positive and healthy (Shetgiri, Lin, Avila, & Flores, 2012).

Addressing bullying in schools is also of concern to parents, and they have opinions about how to address bullying in schools. In a questionnaire of parents of middle school students, 93% believed that “the best way to deal with bullying is to encourage positive interactions” among students at school (Holt, Kantor, & Finkelhor, 2009, p. 53). This supports the idea that positive relationships lead to a positive school climate and that a positive climate can lead to less bullying in schools (Gendron, Williams, & Guerra, 2011; Rhodes, Camic, Milburn, & Lowe, 2009).

Collaboration between parents and teachers can also be successful to stop bullying in school (Crothers & Kolbert, 2008). Parents might want to be involved but are unsure of what they can do to stop bullying. The school should communicate regularly with the parents about what they should do if their child reports they are being bullied at school as well as the mechanisms to report bullying.

### **The Bystander Effect**

To explore the research variables for this study, it was important to determine the theory that would explain the relationship between those variables. In this study, the independent variables were the participants’ gender and grades; the dependent variables were the participants’ differences in their perceptions regarding bullying and their willingness to intervene in a bullying situation. Although not developed using middle school students, the bystander effect (Latané & Darley, 1970) explores the relationship between bystanders and their willingness to intervene.

The bystander effect is a theory researchers Latané and Darley developed in the 1970s. The Bystander Effect states that when there are other people present, the chances are less likely that anyone will intervene in an emergency (Latané & Darley, 1970). The researchers developed the theory of the Bystander Effect when they had learned of a crime that had been committed in New York City in 1964. A woman named Kitty Genovese was raped and murdered, and it was purported that there many bystanders who did not intervene in the attack to assist the victim.

In one study (Latané & Rodin, 1969), a group of college students was told that they were going to take part in an interview about their opinions on new board games. While the subjects were waiting to be interviewed, they could hear what they thought was a person suffering an injury in an accident. A man waiting alone and hearing the cries of distress would go behind the curtain to offer assistance almost 70% of the time. If two or more men were waiting and heard the same cries, the chance of one of them intervening was less than 10% (Latané & Rodin, 1969).

Another study (Latané & Darley, 1970) of bystanders involved males attending Columbia University. Students were selected at random from a list of students and were invited by telephone to participate in an interview about living in a large metropolitan area. While they were waiting, they were asked to complete some paperwork giving information about themselves. In some instances, the participant arrived to an empty room. In other experiments, there were one or two other participants in the room. At that time, unknown to the participants, the researchers would cause a harmless chemical

reaction that would cause the room to fill with smoke. When four minutes had passed, the smoke in the room made it difficult for participants to see and even to breathe. When individuals were alone, they responded quickly to the emergency of the smoke and attempted to report it to someone in another room 75% of the time. When others were present, an individual attempted to report the smoke only 38% of the time. Participants tended to ignore the smoke even if they were coughing and wiping their eyes.

Bystanders have several decisions to make before they will intervene in an emergency (Latané & Darley, 1970). First, the bystander must take notice of the problem. Then, the bystander must decide what he or she should do in relation to the problem. The last decision is to act on the problem. The bystander may not go through the entire decision tree each time he or she is presented with a potential emergency. The decision tree involves noticing an emergency, interpreting the situation as an emergency, assuming responsibility to help, knowing how to help, and deciding to intervene (Latané & Darley, 1970). When deciding how to act in an emergency, bystanders can decide to intervene directly, indirectly (e.g., calling the police or other authority figures), or to not intervene at all (Fischer, Greitemeyer, Pollozek, & Frey, 2006).

Latané and Darley (1970) realized that a fear may exist that society is doomed because people are apathetic toward one another and, therefore, will not lend a helping hand. However, the researchers stated that individuals will help one another and believe that rather than studying the relationship of the bystanders and the victim, it would be of more benefit to study the relationship between the bystanders (Latané & Darley, 1970).

If bystanders are strangers to one another, they may be less likely to intervene than if they know one another. In schools, bystanders to bullying would most likely know the other bystanders and may be more likely to intervene.

Thornberg (2007) conducted research on the bystander effect in a Swedish elementary school during what was considered an emergency in a classroom. When a student was lying on the floor crying, only two students asked the crying student what was wrong. The researcher interviewed all the students following the incident. Among the reasons for not helping was that students did not really think it was an emergency (trivialization), did not know what had happened (dissociation), did not want to make the student who was crying feel self-conscious (embarrassment association), or did not see anyone else helping (audience modeling). These are characteristics of the “passive bystander” (Thornberg, 2007, p. 16). The students who assisted the student reported different reasons for helping; one was curious about what was wrong with him, and the other stated he did not want the student to feel like no one cared about him.

When bullying occurs, there are generally bystanders present (Rivers, Poterat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009). Therefore, the bystander effect is applicable in instances of bullying. Just as bystanders who witness other emergencies, bystanders have a choice to make when they witness bullying. Oh and Hazler (2009) assigned roles to bystanders such as defender of victims, outsider, reinforcer of the bully, or assistant to the bully. The bystander could remain silent and, therefore, unintentionally encourage the bully to continue bullying. The bystander may choose to join the bully in the victimization. The

bystander could also choose to intervene by defending the victim or discouraging the bully's behavior.

### **Behavior of Bystanders**

Bystanders must be encouraged to intervene on behalf of others. The literature suggested that bystanders have potential power; they have the power to stop bullying if they would intervene (Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011). When asked about hypothetical situations, students generally report an opposition to bullying (Salmivalli, 2010). Children can often state the right thing to do when bullying occurs, but they may find it difficult to follow through (Camodeca, 2005). Students may experience cognitive dissonance; they know they should intervene, but they do not (Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashhurst, 2009).

There are many reasons why a bystander may not intervene. The bystander may feel helpless and simply may not have the strategies to know what to do when witnessing acts of bullying. A student may not help because he or she views oneself as an "unskilled helper" (Thornberg, 2007, p. 18). Ahmed (2008) suggested that bystanders do not intervene due to a lack of "behavioral competence" (p. 204). Students may not possess the maturity to determine how they could or should react when witnessing an incidence of bullying.

Peers who do not intervene or who remain passive, do so because of a lack of affinity for neither the bully nor the victim. If a bystander is a friend of the bully, he or she is more likely to assist the bully rather than the bullied (Oh & Hazler, 2009).

However, it is sometimes the norm is to do nothing when witnessing bullying, and, therefore, students feel they are not doing anything wrong by remaining silent (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). These students are simply following the lead of their peers to not intervene.

Another reason that bystanders may choose not to get involved is because they are afraid. The more aggressive the bully is toward others, the less likely bystanders are to help (Oh & Hazler, 2009). Bystanders may experience fear of becoming a new target for the bully, fear being labeled a tattletale, or fear of making the situation worse for the victim (Oz & Hazler, 2009). Another way students can intervene is to simply report the bullying to an adult. Students are reluctant to report bullying for fear of being ridiculed by others (Rivers et al., 2009; Wiens & Dempsey, 2009).

The quality of the relationship between students and their teachers is a deciding factor on whether students will report bullying and other school violence (Yablom, 2010). Studies have indicated that girls tend to intervene more, and girls tend to better relationships with their teachers (Yablom, 2010). This then supports the idea that girls who have good relationships with their teachers may be more likely to report bullying to their teachers. Boys are less likely to report bullying, and they tend to have poorer relationships with their teachers (Oh & Hazler, 2009; Yablom, 2010).

The results of one of the earliest studies of bystanders suggested that in 25% of cases of bullying, bystanders do choose to get involved in a positive way (O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999). An example of bystander intervention occurred on March 7,

2002, when a Williamsport, Pennsylvania high school student approached school shooter Catherine Bush and told her that she did not have to do what she was doing. Only one student was injured in the incident because of the intervention of a bystander (Mitchell, Longhurst, & Jacob, 2008). Girls were significantly more likely to provide support for the victim and intervene more than boys when witnessing bullying (Oh & Hazler, 2009). However, boys are empathetic to others who are bullied, but they sometimes do not know how to communicate or act on those feelings (Willis & Griffith, 2010).

Peers who choose to intervene in acts of bullying have healthy and positive methods of coping with adversity themselves (Lodge & Frydenberg, 2005). These students also felt that no one should be treated in such a negative way by anyone else, and they mentioned a sense of justice for the victim. They felt that bullying was wrong, unfair, not the fault of the victim, and not something students liked to see (McLaughlin, Arnold, & Boyd, 2005).

Lodge and Frydenberg (2005) found that students who intervene in bullying situations have higher self-esteem, express more altruistic actions and feelings, and are high in emotional support from friendships. Intervening is not always an easy decision for those who chose to do it. Bystanders may struggle internally when weighing the decision of whether to stand up against their peer group. They may experience a variety of emotions such as being afraid, worried about the victim, or even sad.

### **Bullying and School Discipline**

How school systems address the issue of bullying can vary from school to school. Some school administrators now have taken a “no tolerance” approach when punishing bullies. Some question whether this is an effective way to address the problem (Allen, 2010; Sacks & Salem, 2009). There is a greater chance of bullying in schools where punitive discipline is exercised (Allen, 2010). Labeling bullies as troublemakers and suspending them from school does little to change the behavior of the bully. Excluding the bully from school would then move the behavior from school into the community where it may not be addressed again unless the student is arrested and becomes involved in the judicial system.

Rather than adopting a strict no tolerance policy, bullying should be treated as any other behavior management or discipline issue that arises in school (Crothers & Kolbert, 2008). The issue should be addressed immediately and consistently. The discipline rendered should not be seen as punitive, but rather as a consequence of a negative behavior (Williams & Winslade, 2008). Administrators do not have to be cruel when applying the disciplinary policy. Again, it is an opportunity to teach that actions have consequences (Yerger & Gehret, 2011).

### **Teaching Bystanders to Intervene**

Children are taught many skills in school, and how to intervene in a bullying situation could be taught as well. Teaching bystanders to intervene requires more than a one-time classroom lesson during homeroom. With the accountability built into the No

Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2002), as well as state and local requirements, teachers may feel they do not have the time to add something else to their already overloaded days (Davidson, 2009). Kindness and caring toward others do not need to be something else teachers have to teach; it can be woven in throughout the school day. If students care about one another, they are more likely to intervene when bullying occurs (Gourneau, 2012). It must be an on-going integrated part of the school day and can be taught through cooperative learning groups.

In a cooperative learning group, students work together to complete a project or a task. The teacher can assign students to groups carefully to manage the students' work and behavior (Choi, Johnson, & Johnson, 2011). Participating in cooperative learning activities can help students learn to work together and become more accepting of their peers (Crothers & Kolbert, 2008). To work in a group, students must become flexible and able to cooperate to come to a successful end result.

Students may not know what to do when they witness bullying. However, witnesses to bullying can be taught to intervene rather than only being observers or outsiders (Rivers, Potrat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009). Social skills and character education can be a part of nearly every interaction in the classroom and can teach children positive ways of relating to one another (Kidron & Fleischman, 2006). Additionally, an antibullying curriculum should be made part of the school culture that teaches students how to not only avoid bullying behaviors but how to intervene (Frey & Fischer, 2008). The teacher must regularly model kindness to students and other staff members.

For any school-wide program to be effective, however, school administrators should prove that there is a need to implement the program (Bernberg & Biggs, 2010). This could be accomplished by conducting a survey of the school's climate or a review of school discipline data. School wide buy-in is vital because if some teachers do not see the importance of the program, it may not be successful. Teachers should be encouraged to implement class-wide programs to teach bystanders how to intervene (Pack, White, Raczynski, & Wang, 2011; Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2011).

However, when implementing interventions and antibullying programs for schools, it must be considered that there are some students who do not find violence or bullying towards classmates to be wrong or distasteful. In a bullying situation, there are some bystanders who might feel support for the bully rather than the victim (Krebs & Jolley, 2007). Interventions are often selected with the assumption that students view bullying as negative and harmful. In fact, there are individuals who might think participating in bullying is an enjoyable experience (Kerbs & Jolley, 2007). Those students receive enjoyment from witnessing negative behavior toward others. Bystanders who have been bullied are more likely to assist bullies or reinforce the behaviors of the bullies (Oh & Hazler, 2009). School-wide programs may not meet the needs of these students, and other programs such as individual counseling or social skills training should be considered (Rodkin, 2011).

### **Literature Related to Methods**

The current study will utilize a quantitative methodology with a descriptive survey design. Creswell (2009) stated that surveys can provide a “description of trends, attitudes, and opinions of a population” (p. 12). A survey is a useful way to gather information from a large group of individuals. Surveys “can be an effective means of collecting subjects’ opinions, demographics, or feedback in a straight forward and potentially low-cost manner” (Greenlaw & Brown-Welty, 2009, p. 464). Some advantages of using an online survey rather than a paper and pencil survey include access to unique populations, saving time for researchers, and not spending money on postage (Wright, 2005). One criticism is that often a lower response rate occurs with both paper and pencil and online surveys than other forms of information gathering (Greenlaw & Brown-Welty, 2009). This does not apply to the current proposed study since the students completed the surveys in their classrooms and turned them in immediately after completing the survey.

### **Conclusion**

Reviewing the literature provided evidence that bystanders’ interventions can benefit the victims of bullying, the bystanders, and the school as a whole. The victim may realize he or she is not alone and then perhaps have an increased sense of self-worth (Gourneau, 2012). The victim might realize that he or she can turn to a peer for help when being bullied (Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011). Levin (2011) reported that 75% of bullied students felt that “getting support from others was most helpful” (p. 22).

What helps make bullying bearable for the victim is “when other children talked to them, spent time with them, called them on the phone, or helped them escape from their tormentors” (Levin, 2011, p. 22). The bystander who intervenes may feel empowered by addressing a real problem in their school (Gendron, Williams, & Guerra, 2011). This has the potential to transform the culture and climate of our schools and, in turn, our society. In order for this to happen, a community of practice must be cultivated that understands the importance of positive relationships (National Middle School Association, 2010).

Just because bullying has always been does not mean it always has to be. Children inherently want to help others and can be taught empathy as well as how to show care for others. With the guidance of bold school leaders, students can learn to stand up for one another and defend those who are bullied.

## Section 3: Methodology

### **Introduction**

Although bullying in schools has been studied by many researchers (Cole, Cornell, & Sheras, 2006; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Ferrell-Smith, 2003; Olweus, 1993; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005), middle school students who witness bullying have not been the focus of research studies. Determining whether students believe bystanders can stop bullying could help alleviate bullying in schools.

In this section, I presented the research design and approach. The setting and sample of the study are explained. The instrumentation and materials used in this study are described. I will explain the data collection and analysis. Finally, measures taken for protection of the participants including the role of the researcher are delineated.

### **Research Design and Approach**

This study was a quantitative methodology with a descriptive survey design. I selected this methodology for use in this study to understand the distinguishing characteristics of a population by drawing a sample of that population (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) suggested that the two methods of quantitative research are experimental and survey (p. 12). A survey design fit the current study because it allowed me to obtain information that I could not otherwise obtain about the students at my school. I selected a survey design for this study and rejected others because it is often difficult or prohibited to conduct controlled experiments in an educational setting using students as subjects. By examining the results of this survey, the study allowed me to investigate the level that

students consider bullying to be a problem for themselves or others, perceptions regarding the impact of bystanders on bullying, and the willingness of students to intervene in incidences of bullying.

### **Setting and Sample**

The setting in which the study took place was a middle school in a school system located in a rural Maryland county. The school system is surrounded by a highly successful business community that supports a U.S. military base. The school community had 7.4% of its population below the poverty level. The middle school whose students answered the questionnaire had 24.91% of all students receiving free or reduced lunch (2011 Maryland Report Card, 2011). There were approximately 805 students enrolled in the school. Of the 805 students, 428 were male and 377 were female. There were 516 students classified as European American and 178 African American students. The rest of the population consisted of 48 Hispanic American students, 18 Asian American students, and two Native American students (2011 Maryland Report Card, 2011). There were 112 students receiving special education services (2011 Maryland Report Card, 2011).

The sample was comprised of all students in Grades 6-8 who were enrolled in a social studies class. Social studies classes were selected because all students in the middle school were required to enroll in this subject. All students in Grades 6-8 were eligible to complete the survey, but not all social studies teachers chose to administer the survey to their students. The principal had made participation optional to the teachers.

The school employed six social studies teachers, and five of those teachers chose to have their classes participate. Students were grouped heterogeneously in social studies classes. Thus, students of all academic abilities were in each class, and the class consisted of both males and females. The ethnic demographics of each class generally reflected the demographics of the school.

### **Instrumentation and Materials**

In this quantitative research study, I used data gathered from one instrument to measure the research variables that were experiences of students who had been bullied or had observed bullying situations in one middle school in southern Maryland. I examined data from a survey, Bullying Survey (Appendix A), that was administered to 548 students in one middle school in the fall of 2010. Students participated in the survey while they were in their social studies classes. The principal selected social studies for the location of the survey because every student is required to be enrolled in a social studies class.

The instrument was specifically designed for use in one school to gain information about bullying in that particular middle school. The instrument was created by a teacher at the school where the survey was administered. The teacher adapted it from a survey found on the National Crime Prevention Council website ("The Bully Situation Survey," n.d.). The instrument has not been used before or since it was used at this middle school; therefore, the reliability and validity of the instrument has not been established.

The survey consisted of four questions and two prompts about bullying. Survey Question 1 required students to answer yes or no to whether they were ever bullied. Student who answered yes were directed to make a selection regarding the frequency and location of the occurrences. Students were allowed to select more than one location. Students who answered no were directed to skip to Survey Item 2. If students responded yes, then students answered Survey Item 2 and made a selection regarding frequency and location of the occurrences. Students were allowed to select more than one location. Students who answered no were directed to skip to Survey Item 3. Survey Item 3 required students to report the level to which bullying is considered a problem on a 3-point scale ranging from very much, not much, to none. Survey Item 4 required students to report the level that bullying is considered a problem for others on a 3-point scale ranging from very much, not much, to none. Survey Item 5 asked students to rank their agreement with a prompt that bullies will stop their behavior if other students intervene using a 5-point scale from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Survey Item 6 asked students to rank their agreement with a prompt that students will intervene when witnessing other students being bullied using a 5-point scale from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree.

To administer the survey, each social studies teacher distributed the instrument to each student at the beginning of each class period. The teacher then read the bullying descriptions to the class, and indicate their grade level on the instrument. The students were to select the best answer for each question. Students were instructed to omit their

names on the survey. Completion of the survey took approximately 10 minutes. Once the surveys were completed, the teacher collected them and returned them to the principal's secretary. The completed surveys are currently housed in a file cabinet in the school's records room.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In the fall of 2010, teachers in one middle school administered the survey as a needs assessment at the request of the principal (Appendix A). The principal was seeking information about the social climate of the school and bullying in the school. Students were surveyed in their social studies classes because every student in the school is enrolled in a social studies class. The original survey results were stored on the principal's password-protected computer. The archival data were also stored and secured on my password-protected laptop that was locked in my office file cabinet when the laptop was not in use.

The archival data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Special Services (SPSS) 19 for Windows. Descriptive statistics and chi-square were used to analyze the data. Results are presented with charts and graphs.

To learn more about student bystanders who witness bullying in middle school, the study was designed to answer the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ 1a: What is the frequency of receiving bullying as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 1b: What is the frequency of receiving bullying by location as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

To examine Research Question 1a and 1b, I used descriptive statistics to analyze the independent variable of grade level and the dependent variable of bullying. Survey Item 1 of Appendix A was used to answer Research Question 1a and 1b.

RQ 2a: What is the frequency of witnessing bullying as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 2b: What is the frequency of witnessing bullying by location as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

To examine Research Question 2a and 2b, I used descriptive statistics to analyze the independent variables of grade and the dependent variable of frequency of witnessing bullying by location and grade level. Survey Item 2 in Appendix A was used to answer Research Question 2a and 2b.

RQ 3: What is the level of the bullying problem as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

To examine Research Question 3, I used descriptive statistics to analyze the independent variable of grade and the dependent variable of level of bullying for students. Survey Item 3 of Appendix A was used to answer Research Question 3.

RQ 4: What is the level of the bullying problem for others as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

To examine Research Question 4, I used descriptive statistics to analyze the independent variable of grade and the dependent variable of the level of bullying for other students. Survey item 4 in Appendix A was used to answer Research Question 4.

RQ 5: What is the relationship between students' willingness to intervene and their grade level?

*H5<sub>0</sub>*: No significant relationship exists between students' willingness to intervene in bullying situations and their grade level.

*H5<sub>a</sub>*: A significant relationship exists between students' willingness to intervene in bullying situations and their grade level.

To examine Research Question 5, I conducted chi square goodness of fit tests on Survey Item 5. The chi-square goodness of fit test is appropriate when the goal of the analysis is to determine whether the proportion of question responses were not equal (Pagano, 2010). Survey Item 5 of Appendix A examined the relationship between students' willingness to intervene and their grade level. Both questions were ordinal in level ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Strongly disagree was coded with the numerical value of 1 with strongly agree coded with the numerical value of 5.

RQ 6: What is the relationship between students' perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level?

*H6<sub>0</sub>*: No significant relationship exists between perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level.

*H6<sub>a</sub>*: A significant relationship exists between perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level.

To examine Research Question 6, I conducted chi square goodness of fit tests on Survey Item 6. The chi-square goodness of fit test is appropriate when the goal of the analysis is to determine whether the proportion of question responses were not equal (Pagano, 2010). Survey Item 6 of Appendix A examined the relationship between students' perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level. Both questions were ordinal in level ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Strongly disagree was coded with the numerical value of 1 with strongly agree coded with the numerical value of 5.

### **Ethical Protection of Participants**

Prior to beginning this study, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University approved all questions, methodology, and risks associated with this study. I obtained letters of cooperation from a representative of the school district (Appendix B) and the school principal (Appendix C). Because the survey was administered at the request of the school's principal as a part of the social studies class, students were not required to sign a consent form. All of the surveys that I examined were anonymous with the students' grade levels being the only identifying information on each survey. There were no foreseeable risks to participating in this survey, because students were verbally given the option of not answering questions on the survey if they felt uncomfortable.

I am the sole researcher for this study. I have been in the education field for more than 27 years at both the middle and high school levels, where I have served as a teacher, counselor, and administrator. I am one of two school counselors at the middle school where the survey was administered, and I have served as a school counselor at that site for 16 years. I have counseled students who are bullies as well as victims of bullying. Students who participated in the research study may have been on the researcher's caseload, but because I examined archival data, my relationship with students in the school had no influence on the data collection.

## Section 4: Results

### **Introduction**

In this section, I present the results from the data analysis. As was described in Section 3, in this quantitative research study, I used data gathered from one instrument to examine the frequency and level of bullying, the relationship between middle school bystanders' willingness to intervene, and their perceptions of impact of intervening in situations of bullying. The instrument used in this study was a survey, Bullying Survey (Appendix A), that was administered to 548 students in one southern Maryland middle school in the fall of 2010.

The study was designed to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1a: What is the frequency of receiving bullying as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 1b: What is the frequency of receiving bullying by location as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 2a: What is the frequency of witnessing bullying as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 2b: What is the frequency of witnessing bullying by location as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 3: What is the level of the bullying problem as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 4: What is the level of the bullying problem for others as reported by students in Grades 6-8?

RQ 5: What is the relationship between students' willingness to intervene and their grade level?

RQ 6: What is the relationship between students' perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level?

### **Results of Data Analysis**

Archival data were analyzed using the SPSS 19 for Windows. Descriptive statistics and chi-square were used to analyze the data. Results are presented with charts and graphs.

#### **Research Question 1a**

To address Research Question 1a, descriptive statistics were calculated for the frequency and percentage for receiving bullying by grade level for Survey Question 1 (Have you ever been bullied at your middle school? If yes, how often did someone bully you?) by grade level (sixth, seventh, and eighth). Of the 548 participants collected for the study, 208 participants (38%) selected "yes" to Survey Question 1 indicating that they had been bullied at school. However, only 203 participants indicated how often they were bullied. Of the 203 participants who responded to Survey Item 1 regarding frequency of bullying, 45 sixth graders (57%), 30 seventh graders (63%), and 44 eighth graders (57%) reported being bullied occasionally. Of 203 participants who responded to Survey Item 1 regarding frequency of bullying, 25 sixth graders (25%), 13 seventh

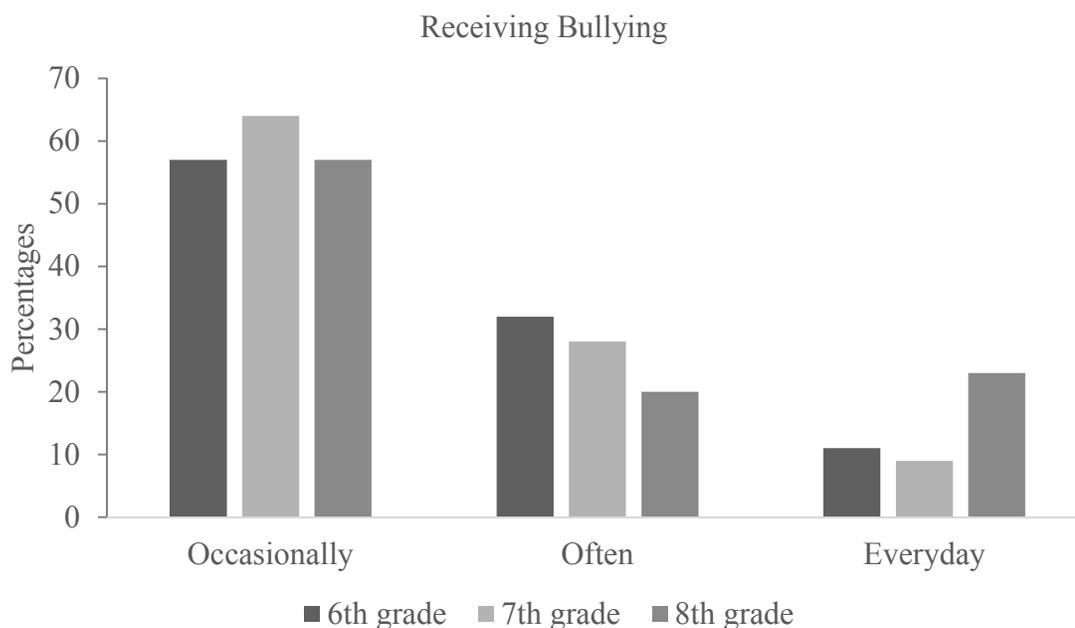
graders (28%), and 15 eighth graders (20%) reported being bullied often. Of 203 participants who responded to Survey Item 1 regarding frequency of bullying, nine sixth graders (11%), four seventh graders (9%), and 18 eighth graders (23%) reported having been bullied every day. Frequencies and percentages for receiving bullying per grade level are presented in Table 1; percentages are visually presented in Figure 1.

Table 1

*Frequencies and Percentages for Receiving Bullying by Grade Level*

Bullying frequency	6 <sup>th</sup> grade <i>N</i> = 79		7 <sup>th</sup> grade <i>N</i> = 47		8 <sup>th</sup> grade <i>N</i> = 77	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Occasionally	45	57	30	64	44	57
Often	25	32	13	28	15	20
Everyday	9	11	4	9	18	23

*Note.* Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding error.



*Figure 1.* Percentages for receiving bullying by grade level.

### **Research Question 1b**

To address Research Question 1b, descriptive statistics were calculated for the frequencies and percentages for receiving bullying by location for Survey Question 1 (Have you ever been bullied at your middle school? Where did it happen?) by grade level (sixth, seventh, and eighth). Of the 548 participants, only 203 participants (37%) indicated where they were bullied. Of the 203 participants who indicated how often they were bullied, 47 sixth graders (59%), 19 seventh graders (40%), and 54 eighth graders (70%) were bullied in the hallway. Of the 203 participants, 36 sixth graders (46%), 22 seventh graders (47%), and 34 eighth graders (44%) were bullied in a classroom. Of the 203 participants, eight sixth graders (10%), one seventh grader (2%), and 22 eighth graders (29%) were bullied in the restroom. Of the 203 participants, 29 sixth graders

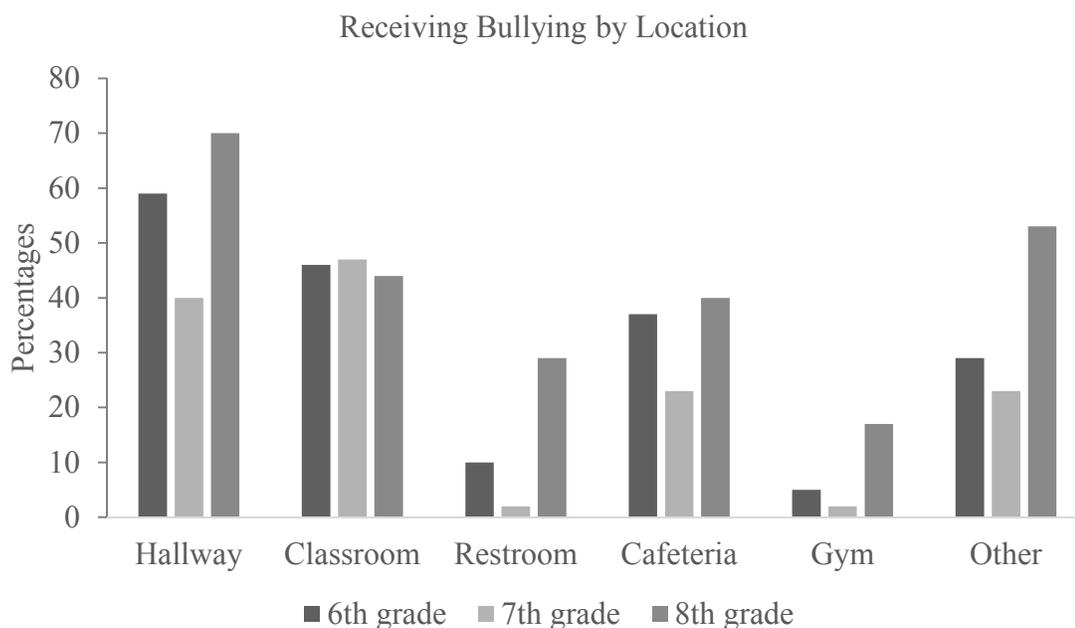
(37%), 11 seventh graders (23%), and 31 eighth graders (40%) were bullied in the cafeteria. Of the 203 participants, four sixth graders (5%), one seventh grader (2%), and 13 eighth graders (17%) were bullied in the gym. Of the 203 participants, 23 sixth graders (29%), 11 seventh graders (23%), and 41 eighth graders (53%) were bullied in another location. Frequencies and percentages for receiving bullying by location per grade level are presented in Table 2; percentages are visually presented in Figure 2.

Table 2

*Frequencies and Percentages for Receiving Bullying by Location by Grade Level*

Bullying locations	6th grade <i>N</i> = 79		7th grade <i>N</i> = 47		8th grade <i>N</i> = 77	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Hallway	47	59	19	40	54	70
Classroom	36	46	22	47	34	44
Restroom	8	10	1	2	22	29
Cafeteria	29	37	11	23	31	40
Gym	4	5	1	2	13	17
Other	23	29	11	23	41	53

*Note.* Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding errors and the participants' allowance to select multiple responses.



*Figure 2.* Percentages for receiving bullying by location by grade level.

### **Research Question 2a**

To address Research Question 2a, descriptive statistics were calculated for the frequency and percentages of witnessing bullying for Survey Question 2 (Have you seen other students being bullied at your middle school? If yes, how often did it happen?) by grade level (sixth, seventh, and eighth). Of the 548 participants collected for the study, only 402 participants (73%) selected yes on Survey Question 2. Only 399 participants indicated how often they witnessed other students being bullied. Of the 399 participants, 52 sixth graders (34%), 42 seventh graders (45%), and 66 eighth graders (43%) indicated that they had witnessed bullying occasionally. Of the 399 participants, 66 sixth graders (44%), 32 seventh graders (34%), and 50 eighth graders (32%) witnessed bullying often. Of 399 participants, 33 sixth graders (22%), 19 seventh graders (20%), and 39 eighth

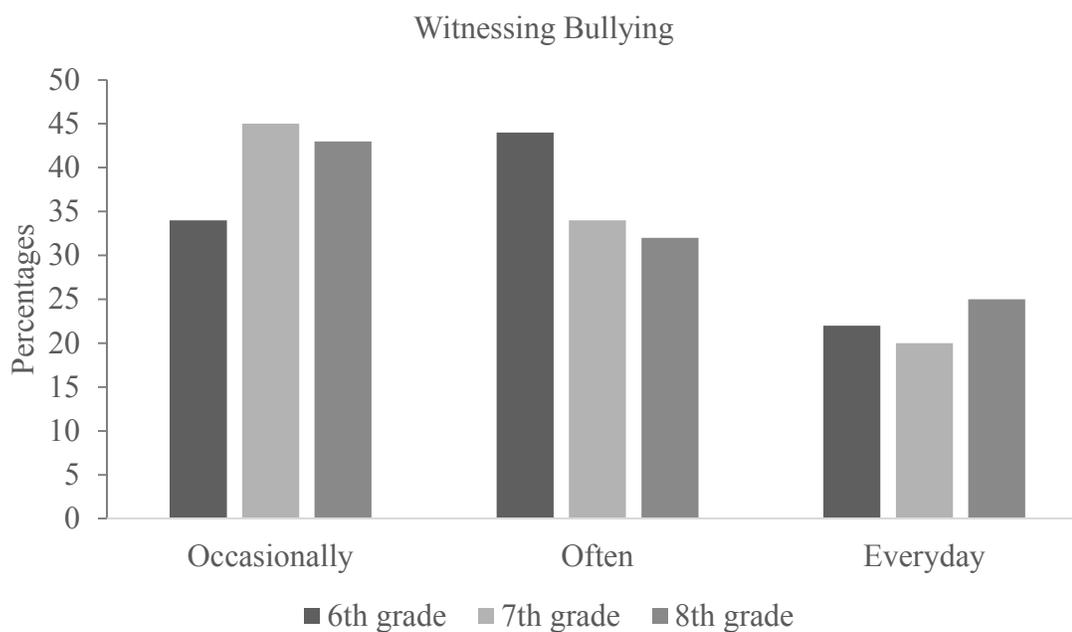
graders (25%) witnessed bullying every day. Frequencies and percentages for witnessing bullying by grade level are presented in Table 3; percentages are visually presented in Figure 3.

Table 3

*Frequencies and Percentages for Witnessing Bullying by Grade Level*

Bullying frequency	6th grade <i>N</i> = 151		7th grade <i>N</i> = 93		8th grade <i>N</i> = 155	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Occasionally	52	34	42	45	66	43
Often	66	44	32	34	50	32
Everyday	33	22	19	20	39	25

*Note.* Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding error.



*Figure 3.* Percentages for witnessing bullying by grade level.

**Research Question 2b**

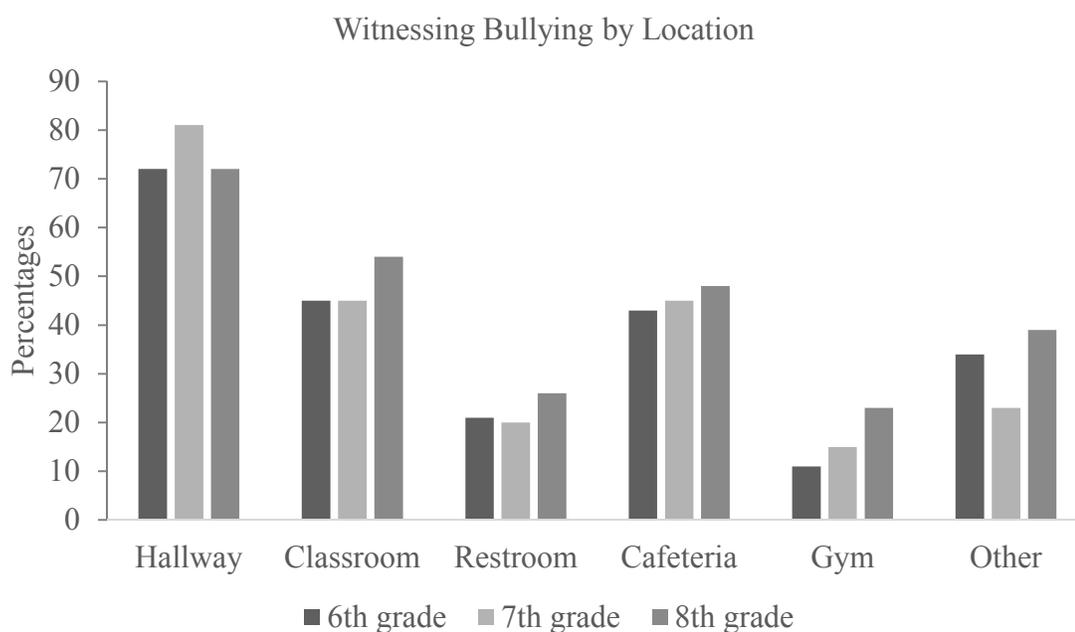
To address Research Question 2b, descriptive statistics were calculated for the frequency and percentage of the location where students witnessed bullying for survey question two (*Have you seen other students being bullied at your middle school? Where have you seen other students bullied?*) by grade level (sixth, seventh, and eighth). Of the 548 participants collected for the study, 402 participants (73%) responded “yes” on Survey Question 2. Only 399 participants actually indicated how often they witnessed other students being bullied. Of 399 participants who responded to the question regarding the location of witnessing bullying, 108 sixth graders (72%), 75 seventh graders (81%), and 112 eighth graders (72%) witnessed bullying in the hallway. Of 399 participants, 68 sixth graders (45%), 42 seventh graders (45%), and 83 eighth graders (54%) witnessed bullying in a classroom. Of 399 participants, 31 sixth graders (21%), 42 seventh graders (45%), and 41 eighth graders (26 %) witnessed bullying in restroom. Of 399 participants, 65 sixth graders (43%), 42 seventh graders (45%), and 74 eighth graders (48%) witnessed bullying in the cafeteria. Of 399 participants, 17 sixth graders (11%), 14 seventh graders (15%), and 35 eighth graders (23%) witnessed bullying in the gym. Of 399 participants, 52 sixth graders (34%), 21 seventh graders (23%), and 60 eighth graders (39%) witnessed bullying in another unspecified location. Frequencies and percentages for witnessing bullying by location per grade level are presented in Table 4; percentages are visually presented in Figure 4.

Table 4

*Frequencies and Percentages for Witnessing Bullying by Location per Grade Level*

Bullying locations	6th grade N = 151		7th grade N = 93		8th grade N = 155	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Hallway	108	72	75	81	112	72
Classroom	68	45	42	45	83	54
Restroom	31	21	19	20	41	26
Cafeteria	65	43	42	45	74	48
Gym	17	11	14	15	35	23
Other	52	34	21	23	60	39

*Note.* Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding errors and participants' allowance to select multiple responses.



*Figure 4.* Percentages for witnessing bullying by location and grade level.

### Research Question 3

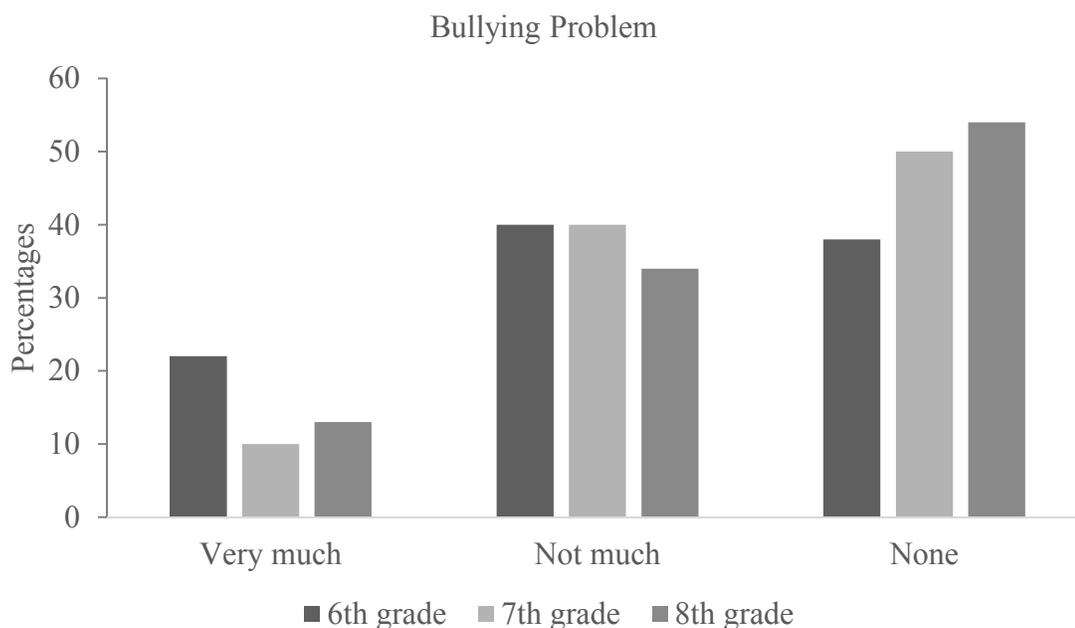
To address Research Question 3, descriptive statistics were calculated for the frequency and percentage of how much a problem participants consider bullying to be for them by grade level. Of the 534 participants who responded to Question 3 regarding how much of a problem bullying is for them, 44 sixth graders (22%), 12 seventh graders (10%), and 26 eighth graders (13%) reported bullying is very much a problem. Of the 534 participants, 82 sixth graders (40%), 50 seventh graders (40%), and 70 eighth graders (34%) reported that bullying is not much of a problem. Of 534 participants, 77 sixth graders (38%), 62 seventh graders (50%), and 111 eighth graders (54%) reported none regarding bullying being a problem. Frequencies and percentages for bullying problem by grade level are presented in Table 5; percentages are visually presented in Figure 5.

Table 5

*Frequencies and Percentages for Bullying Problem by Grade Level*

Bullying problem	6th grade <i>N</i> = 203		7th grade <i>N</i> = 124		8th grade <i>N</i> = 207	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Very much	44	22	12	10	26	13
Not much	82	40	50	40	70	34
None	77	38	62	50	111	54

*Note.* Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding error.



*Figure 5.* Percentages for bullying problem by grade level.

#### **Research Question 4**

What is the level of the bullying problems for others as reported by students in grades 6 – 8?

To address Research Question 4, descriptive statistics were calculated for the frequency and percentage of how much participants view bullying as a problem for others by grade level for Survey Question 4 (*How much of a problem is bullying for other students?*) by grade level (6th, 7th, and 8th). Of the 548 participants who participated in the survey, only 533 participants answered Survey Question 4. Of 533 participants who responded to Survey Question 4, 82 sixth graders (40%), 40 seventh graders (33%), and 73 eighth graders (35%) view bullying as very much a problem for others. Of 533 participants, 104 sixth graders (51%), 66 seventh graders (54%), and 105 eighth graders

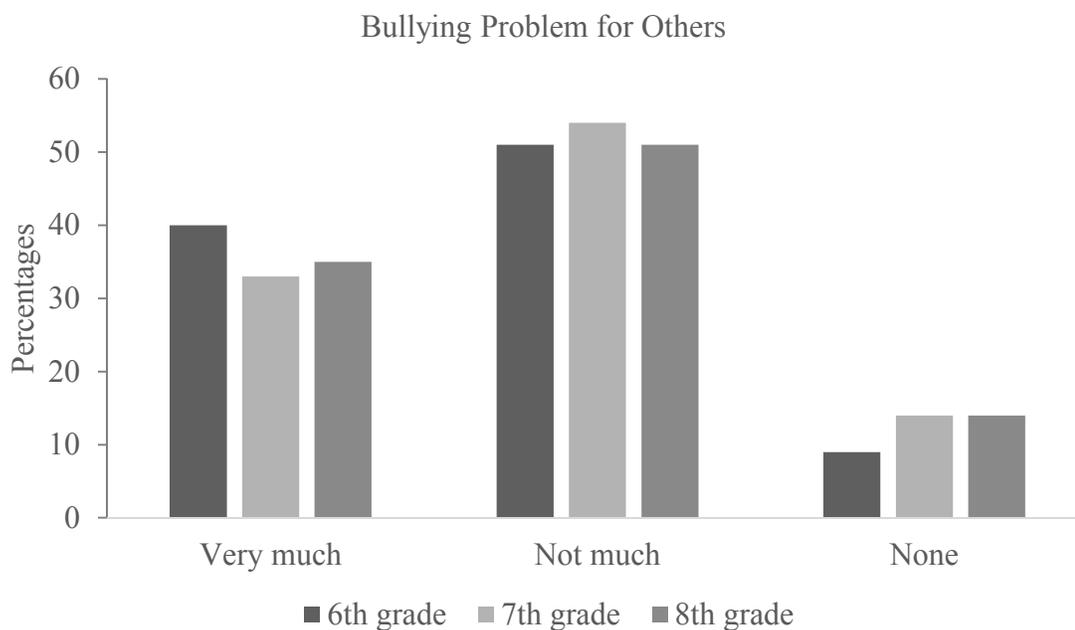
(51%) reported bullying is not much of a problem for others. Of 533 participants, 18 sixth graders (9%), 17 seventh graders (14%), and 28 eighth graders (14%) view bullying as not a problem for others. Frequencies and percentages for bullying problem for others by grade level are presented in Table 6; percentages are visually presented in Figure 6.

Table 6

*Frequencies and Percentages for Bullying Problem for Others by Grade Level*

Bullying problem	6th grade <i>N</i> = 204		7th grade <i>N</i> = 123		8th grade <i>N</i> = 206	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Very much	82	40	40	33	73	35
Not much	104	51	66	54	105	51
None	18	9	17	14	28	14

*Note.* Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding error.



*Figure 6.* Percentages for bullying problem for others by grade level.

### **Research Question 5**

What is the relationship between students' willingness to intervene and their grade level?

*H5<sub>0</sub>*: No significant relationship exists between students' willingness to intervene in bullying situations and their grade level.

*H5<sub>a</sub>*: A significant relationship exists between students' willingness to intervene in bullying situations and their grade level.

To address Research Question 5, three chi square goodness-of-fit tests were conducted to determine if a statistically significant relationship exists between the responses regarding Survey Question 5 (*Bullies will stop bullying if other students tell them to stop*) and grade level; one test was conducted per grade level (sixth, seventh, and eighth). Of the 548 participants collected for the study, only 544 participants answered Survey Question 5. The results of the three chi square goodness-of-fit tests on Survey Question 5 responses (one test per grade level) are presented in Table 7; frequencies are visually presented in Figure 7.

The chi square test yielded statistically significant findings ( $p < .001$ ) for participants in the 6th grade. For 205 participants in the sixth grade, 63 participants responded strongly agree which is higher than the expected value of 41.0; 78 participants responded agree which was higher than the expected value of 41.0; 50 participants responded neutral which is higher than the expected value of 41.0; 7 participants responded disagree which was lower than the expected value of 41.0; 7 participants

responded strongly disagree which was lower than the expected value of 41.0. I failed to reject the null hypothesis.

The chi square test yielded statistically significant findings ( $p < .001$ ) for participants in the seventh grade. For 126 participants in the seventh grade, 39 participants responded strongly agree which is higher than the expected value of 25.2; 39 participants responded agree' which was higher than the expected value of 25.2; 34 participants responded neutral which is higher than the expected value of 25.2; 7 participants responded disagree which was lower than the expected value of 25.2; 7 participants responded strongly disagree which was lower than the expected value of 25.2. I failed to reject the null hypothesis.

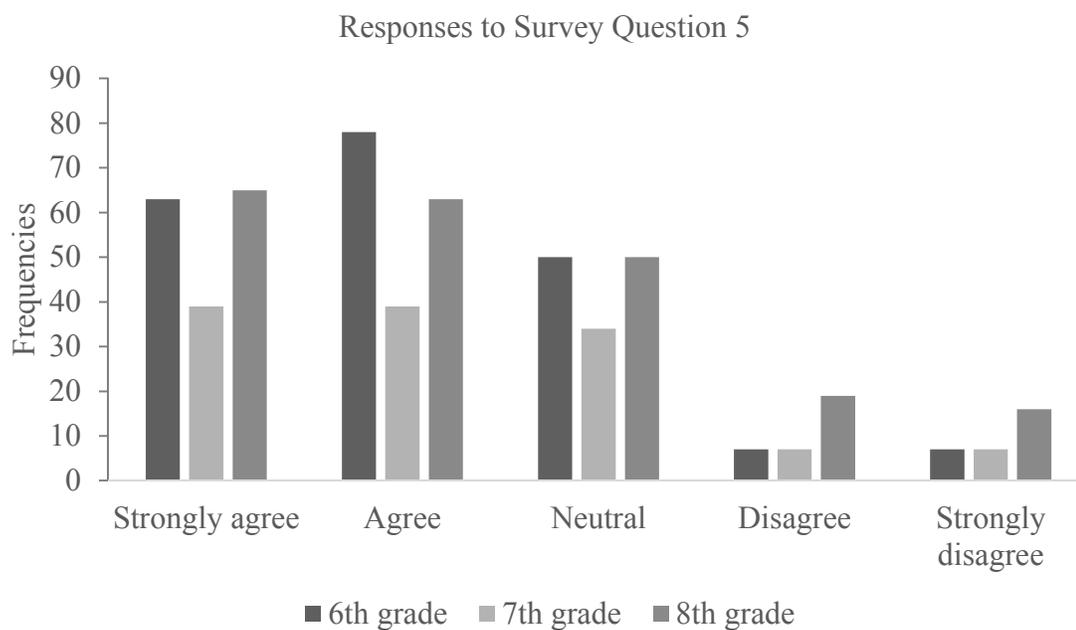
The chi square test yielded statistically significant findings ( $p < .001$ ) for participants in the eighth grade. For 213 participants in the eighth grade, 65 participants responded strongly agree which is higher than the expected value of 42.6; 63 participants responded agree which was higher than the expected value of 42.6; 50 participants responded neutral which is higher than the expected value of 42.6; 19 participants responded disagree which was lower than the expected value of 42.6; 16 participants responded strongly disagree which was lower than the expected value of 42.6. I failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 7

*Chi Square Goodness-of-Fit Tests on Survey Question 5 Responses (One per Grade Level)*

Survey question 5	6th grade N = 205		7th grade N = 126		8th grade N = 213	
	Obs.	Exp.	Obs.	Exp.	Obs.	Exp.
Response						
Strongly agree	63	41.0	39	25.2	65	42.6
Agree	78	41.0	39	25.2	63	42.6
Neutral	50	41.0	34	25.2	50	42.6
Disagree	7	41.0	7	25.2	19	42.6
Strongly disagree	7	41.0	7	25.2	16	42.6
$\chi^2(4)$	103.56		44.48		52.52	
<i>p</i>	<.001		<.001		<.001	

*Note.* Obs. = observed value. Exp. = expected value.



*Figure 7.* Observed responses to survey question 5 by grade level.

### Research Question 6

What is the relationship between students' perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level?

$H_{6_0}$ : No significant relationship exists between perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level.

$H_{6_a}$ : A significant relationship exists between perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level.

To address Research Question 6, three chi square goodness-of-fit tests were conducted to determine if a statistically significant relationship exists between the responses regarding Survey Question 6 (*If I see someone being bullied, I will help the student being bullied*); one test was conducted per grade level (sixth, seventh, and eighth). Of the 548 participants collected for the study, only 537 participants answered Survey Question 6. Each chi square test resulted in statistically significant findings ( $p < .001$ ). The results of the three chi square goodness-of-fit tests on Survey Question 6 responses (one test per grade level) are presented in Table 8; frequencies are visually presented in Figure 8.

The chi square test yielded statistically significant findings ( $p < .001$ ) for participants in the sixth grade. For 205 participants in the 6th grade, 9 participants responded strongly agree which is lower than the expected value of 41.0; 8 participants responded agree which was lower than the expected value of 41.0; 57 participants responded neutral which is higher than the expected value of 41.0; 71 participants

responded disagree which was higher than the expected value of 41.0; 60 participants responded strongly disagree which was higher than the expected value of 41.0.

I accepted the null hypothesis.

The chi square test yielded statistically significant findings ( $p < .001$ ) for participants in the seventh grade. For 123 participants in the seventh grade, 7 participants responded strongly agree which is lower than the expected value of 24.6; 10 participants responded agree which was lower than the expected value of 24.6; 41 participants responded neutral which is higher than the expected value of 24.6; 37 participants responded disagree which was higher than the expected value of 24.6; 28 participants responded strongly disagree which was higher than the expected value of 24.6.

I failed to reject the null hypothesis.

The chi square test yielded statistically significant findings ( $p < .001$ ) for participants in the eighth grade. For 209 participants in the eighth grade, 12 participants responded strongly agree which is lower than the expected value of 41.8; 9 participants responded agree which was lower than the expected value of 41.8; 60 participants responded neutral which is higher than the expected value of 41.8; 59 participants responded disagree which was higher than the expected value of 41.8; 69 participants responded strongly disagree which was higher than the expected value of 41.8.

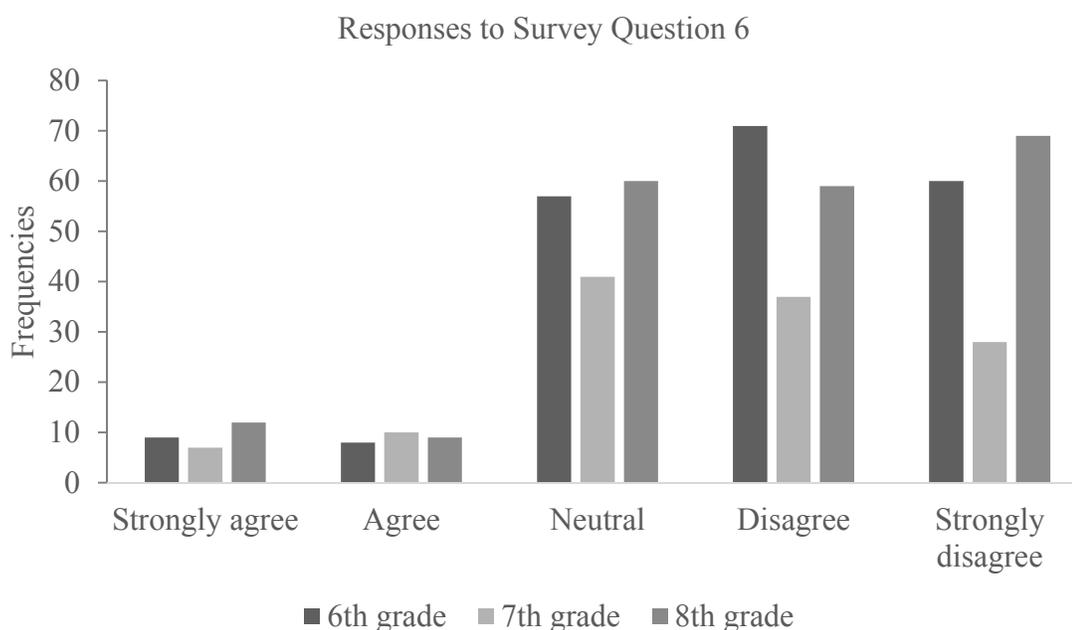
I accepted the null hypothesis.

Table 8

*Chi Square Goodness-of-Fit Tests on Survey Question 6 Responses (One per Grade Level)*

Survey question 6	6th grade <i>N</i> = 205		7th grade <i>N</i> = 123		8th grade <i>N</i> = 209	
	Obs.	Exp.	Obs.	Exp.	Obs.	Exp.
Response						
Strongly agree	9	41.0	7	24.6	12	41.8
Agree	8	41.0	10	24.6	9	41.8
Neutral	57	41.0	41	24.6	60	41.8
Disagree	71	41.0	37	24.6	59	41.8
Strongly disagree	60	41.0	28	24.6	69	41.8
$\chi^2(4)$	88.54		38.91		79.68	
<i>P</i>	<.001		<.001		<.001	

*Note.* Obs. = observed value. Exp. = expected value.



*Figure 8.* Observed responses to survey question 6 by grade level.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine the frequency and level of bullying, and the relationship between middle school bystanders' willingness to intervene, and their perceptions of intervening in situations of bullying by grade level. Results of the study indicated the following:

1. Of all participants surveyed, 38% reported being bullied at school. The majority of those students in Grades 6 (57%), 7 (63%), and 8 (57%) indicated that they had been bullied occasionally. Of the participants who reported being bullied, 22% of sixth graders (33), 20% of seventh graders (19), and 25% of eighth graders (39) reported being bullied every day. As such, the majority of students who reported being bullied stated that they were only bullied occasionally, while a smaller group of students reported being bullied every day.
2. The location where students were bullied varied across grade levels. The majority of students in sixth (59%) and eighth grades (70%) indicated that they were bullied in the hallway. Many students in seventh grade (47%) indicated that they were bullied in the classroom. A majority of eighth graders (53%) also reported being bullied in another unspecified location other than the hallway or classroom. The high proportion of students who reported being bullied in the hallway or in another specified location outside of the classroom indicates that a large portion of bullying occurs in locations where students may not be under direct supervision of a teacher. However, the high percentage of seventh grade students who

reported being bullied within the classroom indicates that bullying occurs to some degree in all areas of the school.

3. Of the 548 responses collected for the study, 402 participants (73%) witnessed bullying at school. Many students in sixth grade (44%) indicated that they often witnessed bullying. Students in seventh (45%) and eighth (43%) grades reported occasionally witnessing bullying. Students across all grade levels report that they have observed bullying.
4. The location where students witnessed bullying varied across grade levels. Of the 73% of students who reported witnessing bullying at school, the majority of students in sixth (78%) and seventh (54%) grades witnessed bullying in the hallway, while eighth grade students reporting witnessing bullying in the hallway (72%) and classroom (54%). As such, students most often witnessed bullying outside of the classroom, indicating that bullying may be witnessed more often in areas of the school where students are not under direct supervision. However, as eighth grade students also reported witnessing bullying within the classroom bullying appears to occur both outside and within the classroom.
5. Many students in Grades 6 (50%), 7 (50%), and 8 (54%) indicated that bullying is not much of a problem for them. However, 22% of sixth graders (44), 10% of seventh graders (12), and 13% of eighth graders (26) report that bullying is *very much* a problem for them. The high proportion of students who indicate that bullying is not a problem for them suggests that across all age groups most

students do not have trouble with bullying. However, the fact that a higher proportion of sixth grade students indicated that bullying was *very much* a problem for them may indicate that among those students who are bullied, younger students perceive the bullying as a larger problem.

6. The majority of students in Grades 6 (51%), 7 (54%), and 8 (51%) indicated that bullying is not a problem for others. While previous results indicate that a majority of students have observed bullying occurring in the school, most students do not view it as a problem for others.
7. In Grades 6, 7, and 8, a greater than expected proportion of students stated that they either strongly agree, agree, or feel neutrally towards the statement that bullies will stop bullying if other students tell them to stop. Furthermore, the chi square test was significant ( $p < .001$ ) for each grade level, indicating that a significant relationship exists between perceptions regarding the impact of intervening and participant grade level. These results indicate that the majority of students either believe that intervening will cause a bully to stop bullying or are unsure of the effect of intervening.
8. Of 205 participants in the eighth grade, 131 students strongly disagree or disagree that if they see someone being bullied, they will help the student being bullied. Of 123 participants in the seventh grade, 65 students strongly disagree or disagree that if they see someone being bullied, they will help the student being bullied. Of 209 participants in the sixth grade, 128 students strongly disagree or disagree

that if they see someone being bullied, they will help the student being bullied.

There is a significant relationship between students' likelihood to intervene and their grade level. The percentages of students who responded that they would intervene if they witnessed bullying or that they were unsure if they would intervene were similar across all grades.

Section 5 will include an interpretation of the findings of the research study, implications for social change, and recommendations for action and further research.

## Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the frequency and level of bullying, the relationship between middle school bystanders' willingness to intervene, and their perceptions of intervening in situations of bullying by grade level. Although many school leaders have implemented antibullying programs, bullying continues to exist in schools (Yerger & Gehret, 2011). The intervention of bystanders is a key tool to stopping the cycle of bullying (Rodkin, 2011). To assess the probability of bystanders intervening in situations of bullying, 548 middle school students completed an anonymous Bullying Survey. Archival data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square to analyze the research variables.

The study was designed to answer the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ 1a: What is the frequency of receiving bullying as reported by students in Grades 6–8?

RQ 1b: What is the frequency of receiving bullying by location as reported by students in Grades 6–8?

RQ 2a: What is the frequency of witnessing bullying as reported by students in Grades 6–8?

RQ 2b: What is the frequency of witnessing bullying by location as reported by students in Grades 6–8?

RQ 3: What is the level of the bullying problem as reported by students in Grades 6–8?

RQ 4: What is the level of the bullying problem for others as reported by students in Grades 6–8?

RQ 5: What is the relationship between students' willingness to intervene and their grade level?

*H5<sub>0</sub>*: No significant relationship exists between students' willingness to intervene in bullying situations and their grade level.

*H5<sub>a</sub>*: A significant relationship exists between students' willingness to intervene in bullying situations and their grade level.

RQ 6: What is the relationship between students' perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level?

*H6<sub>0</sub>*: No significant relationship exists between perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level.

*H6<sub>a</sub>*: A significant relationship exists between perceptions regarding impact of intervening and their grade level.

Of the 548 students who completed the survey, the majority of students indicated that they were occasionally bullied and that bullying occurs in all areas of the school. Students reported witnessing bullying in hallways as well as classrooms. Despite school reports, 62% of students indicated that bullying is not much of a problem for them, nor is it much of a problem for their peers. The majority of students indicated that bullies will

stop if others tell them to stop. However, few students indicated that they would help a student being bullied, despite the fact that they thought intervening would be effective.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

I explored the frequency and level of bullying, the relationship between middle school bystanders' willingness to intervene, and their perceptions of intervening in situations of bullying by grade level. While 62% of the students in this study reported that bullying is not an issue for them, 38% of students reported being bullied at school. In their study, DeVoe and Bauer (2010) reported that 36–43% of students were bullied in middle school, which is similar to the results of this study. Bullying generally occurs in unsupervised areas of the school (Kennedy et al., 2012). In my study, students reported being bullied in unsupervised areas of the school such as the hallways, restrooms, cafeteria, and gym, which is similar to the findings of Kennedy et al.(2012). Many students in Grade 6 (46%), Grade 7 (47%), and Grade 8 (44%) reported that they were bullied in the classroom. It must be noted that the classroom could be considered an unsupervised area of school if the teacher is not aware of the actions of his or her students. However, when teachers are cognizant of the interactions between their students, fewer opportunities exist for students to bully one another (Crothers & Kolbert, 2008). Many students (73%) reported observing bullying, and bullying was observed in all areas of the school.

The results of this study support the research conducted by Latané and Darley (1970) regarding their theory of the bystander effect. According to the bystander effect,

when others are present during an emergency, individuals feel less obligated to intervene. Students demonstrating the bystander effect may fail to intervene as they assume that someone else will step up to help the student being bullied. In the current study, students reported that they would not tell a bully to stop when witnessing an incident of bullying. Of the 548 students who responded to Survey Question 6 (If I see someone being bullied, I will help the student being bullied), 54 students (10%) answered strongly agree or agree. Of those same 548 students, 298 students (55%) answered strongly disagree or disagree. One reason for the lack of willingness to help is that students may never have intervened in an incidence of bullying and therefore might not know that they should (Swearer et al., 2010). If students are aware that they should intervene, it is possible that they may not know what to do to help a classmate; however, they can be taught the skills to intervene (Rivers et al., 2009).

In the current study, students reported that they believed a bully would stop if other students would tell them to stop, even though 90% of students indicated that they would not intervene in a bullying situation. Salmivalli et al. (2011) stated that bystanders may not be aware of the potential power they have to stop bullying. Students are aware that bullying continues to be an issue in their schools and among their peers; however, they are not willing to intervene. Students reported that they know the right thing to do when bullying occurs, but they find it difficult to follow through (Camodeca, 2005).

### **Implications for Social Change**

Bullying is happening in many schools. Middle school students are bullied and observe bullying of others. Bullying occurs in nearly all areas of the school with much of it occurring in less supervised areas. Students believe that bullies will stop if other students tell them to stop; however, few students are willing to help someone being bullied. The implications for positive social change include school leaders gaining a better understanding of the perceptions of bystanders that will allow educators and school counselors to address students' unwillingness to intervene in incidences of bullying by providing them with the skills necessary to intervene in order to reduce bullying in schools.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Based on the results of this study, students reported being bullied and having witnessed bullying in all areas of the school building. More bystanders than bullies exist, so the sheer number of bystanders should end bullying if they are willing to intervene to reduce the incidence of bullying. Bystanders can be trained to intervene when they witness a bullying situation occur in their school, and this training can be provided by educators and school counselors. This training needs to become widely implemented for bullying to be reduced.

Students believe that the actions of bystanders can help end bullying, but students are not willing to be the bystanders who intervene. When intervening a bullying incident, students are reluctant to help, largely because the bystander students lack courage to help.

Cowie (2014) suggested that bystanders feel “powerless” and “wish for the skills to intervene in some way (p. 29). Additionally, if school leaders inform students of effective ways to intervene, then students may be more willing to intervene on behalf of their peers instead of choosing to do nothing (Swearer et al., 2010). Bullying will not disappear without the intervention of peers. If just one bystander intervenes on behalf of the bully, others will help (Hutchinson, 2012).

A number of strategies can be employed by schools to assist students with becoming more confident with the intervention. Locally, the superintendent has included antibullying among his initiatives and encourages students to intervene and report bullying in an effort to end the bullying. Teachers are encouraged to learn the many ways students can quietly or blatantly bully others. Teachers, who are also often bystanders, can then model the behavior of standing up to bullies. Teachers should encourage bystanders to intervene and address bullying each time it occurs in their classrooms (Polanin et al., 2012). Administrators should stress the importance of bystanders at school assemblies, in communication between school and home, and in meetings with staff and parents (Polanin et al., 2012).

The results of this study should be of interest to school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. I will disseminate the results at a local board of education meeting. Additionally, the principal and staff of the school where the study was conducted and department of student services will receive the study results.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

In the current quantitative study, I examined the frequency and level of bullying, the relationship between middle school bystanders' willingness to intervene, and their perceptions of the impact of intervening in situations of bullying. Because existing data were used, the only demographic variable examined in the current study was grade level; future studies should include schools within a district of varying socio-economic status to explore if socio-economic status influences student perceptions. Although the information gathered from the survey was valuable, the sample size of 548 students was small. Future research should use a larger sample size for the results to become more generalized to similar research settings.

Additionally, qualitative research should be conducted regarding the perceptions of bystanders who have witnessed peers being bullied. This research could help determine why students intervene or do not intervene. Research to examine the bystander effect (Latané & Darley, 1970) in middle schools would provide further information about why students do not intervene to help their peers when they are not the only witness to a peer being bullied.

### **Conclusion**

Bullying is a serious problem in society. Despite the best efforts of school leaders to stop bullying, bullying continues to happen in schools, and students believe bullies can be stopped. School leaders, teachers, other school personnel, and parents should encourage students to intervene. If students are taught the skills to intervene on behalf of

others, then they will no longer just be bystanders to the bullying. The intervention of students in situations of bullying may reduce and possibly eliminate the continuance of bullying altogether. This change has the potential to make the school bully-free by implementing effective antibullying programs that encourage bystanders to intervene and provide students with the skills to help in bullying situations.

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## Appendix A: Bullying Survey

Grade \_\_\_\_\_

## Types of Bullying

- *Physical aggression*—physical harm or destroying property.
- *Social aggression*—rumors, racial slurs, or exclusion from a group.
- *Verbal aggression*—name-calling, teasing, or threatening.
- *Intimidation*—phone calls, dirty tricks, or taking possessions.
- *Written aggression*—threatening notes or graffiti.
- *Sexual harassment*—comments or actions of a sexual nature that make the recipient uncomfortable.

*Racial and cultural (ethnic) harassment*—comments or actions containing racial or ethnic overtones that make the recipient uncomfortable. **Directions:** Read the descriptions of bullying above. Using those definitions, circle or underline the best answers to the following questions. You may have more than one best answer for some questions. **DO NOT put your name on this paper.**

1. Have you ever been bullied at XXXXXX Middle School?      YES                      NO

❖ If YES, how often did someone bully you?

Occasionally                      Often                      Every Day

❖ Where did it happen?

Hallway Classroom                      Restroom Cafeteria Gym Other

2. Have you seen other students being bullied at XXXXXX Middle School?

YES      NO

❖ If YES, how often did it happen?

Occasionally                      Often                      Every Day

❖ Where have you seen other students bullied?

Hallway Classroom                      Restroom Cafeteria Gym Other

3. How much of a problem is bullying for you?

Very Much                      Not Much                      None

4. How much of a problem is bullying for other students?

Very Much      Not Much      None

5. Bullies will stop bullying if other students tell them to stop.

Strongly agree      agree      neutral      disagree      strongly disagree

6. If I see someone being bullied, I will help the student being bullied.

Strongly agree      agree      neutral      disagree      strongly disagree

Adapted from a survey by The National Crime Prevention Council

## Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

January 21, 2014

Ms. Elizabeth Beasley  
321 Grover Lane  
Lusby, Maryland 20657

Dear Ms. Beasley:

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Perceptions of Middle School Bystanders to Bullying Incidences* within

Public Schools. As part of this study, I authorize you to use the bullying questionnaire that was conducted. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

  
*Supervisor of School Counseling*

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).

## Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation

January 29, 2014

Dear Ms. Beasley:

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Perceptions of Middle School Bystanders to Bullying Incidences* at \_\_\_\_\_ Middle School. As part of this study, I authorize you to use the data from the questionnaire that was conducted. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Middle School

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).