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Exploring the Meaning of School Bullying Among Parents of Victimized Children

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Walden University
2015

Abstract

Exploring the Meaning of School Bullying Among Parents of Victimized Children

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Mildred Peyton

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2015

Abstract

Bullying in American schools has increased to what some have considered an epidemic and is a major problem among youth. Bullied youth experience poorer mental health and lower school performance, in comparison to those who are not bullied, and the growth of bullying has raised concerns from parents, schools, policy makers, and human-services professionals interested in prevention and intervention of bullying behaviors. The purpose of this study was to explore how parents whose children experienced school bullying perceived school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family's dynamics, to better understand the parents' internal experiences. The theoretical framework for this study was the symbolic interactionism theory, which posits that individuals develop subject meanings of themselves and their world, based on their experiences. A phenomenological study design was employed, using purposeful semistructured interviews of 7 parents of different schools, all of whom had witnessed bullying in their children's lives. Data were open coded and analyzed for emergent themes. The study showed that these 7 parents were not satisfied with their respective school's approach to handling bullying, especially when their home environments were adversely impacted. One recommendation that stemmed from these findings was to establish sanctions for schools failing to adhere to bullying policies. This study may provoke positive social change in the area of school safety and in areas concerning improved understanding and communication among parents, teachers, school administrators, and other professionals. Along with this notion, students may have the opportunity to thrive in a more secure atmosphere, which may lead to positive social and emotional achievements that may promote higher societal achievements.

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DEDICATION

This doctoral research study is dedicated to family and friends whose love and support carried me through this journey. I dedicate this doctoral study to my children, Leah and Jada, whose future was a constant source of motivation. I also dedicate this project to my husband, Edward (Eddie), whose love reassured me that achieving my personal goal was important. He was always there to watch the kids and keep them busy while I was working on my dissertation. To my mother, Kadijatu (Kadi), I dedicate this work to her, for her spiritual and emotional support; and my father, Milford, for demonstrating the concept of perseverance and determination in my present, and childhood years. I would also like to dedicate this study to my brother, Ronald, who believed in my goal. This study is also dedicated to my cousin, Dr. Eleanor Vincent, who supported me and led the way as the first doctor in our family, and made me believe that I, too, can attain the same goal. And lastly, I dedicate this study to my uncle, Wahid, who periodically checked-in on me and cheered me on throughout this process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Bullying has become a continuing worldwide epidemic, and a serious problem in schools throughout the United States, so much so that states have enacted laws that target this issue (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). Commonly seen on school grounds, bullying was reported in a national survey in 2003 (as cited in Hahn et al., 2007), with more than 1.56 million incidents of victimization inflicted on those between the ages of 12 and 20 (as cited in Kueny & Zirkel, 2012; McMurrer-Shank, 2010; Rigby, 2013). Of students aged 12 to 18 years old, 7.2% reported having been bullied in the last 6 months while at school (Hahn et al., 2007). Results from a national survey (as cited in Cornell, Gregory, Huang, & Fan, 2013) indicated that 28% of adolescents in the United States reported being victims of bullying during the past school year, and another national study (as cited in Cornell et al., 2013) concluded that one fifth of children and youth reported bullying victimization, and one fourth reported being teased and harassed by their peers in the past year. The prevalence of bullying in schools has left administrators, parents, teachers, and policymakers with questions about how this problem can be prevented, and what types of intervention methods should be considered. Several legislatures (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012) have proposed laws that require schools to create antibullying policies and programs that administrators and teachers must implement. These laws were prompted after a suicide case in Massachusetts of a 15-year-old adolescent. The teenager committed suicide after facing months of bullying experiences from peers (Kueny & Zirkel, 2012; McMurrer-Shank, 2010).

Children who are bullied during school hours have significantly poorer mental health than others (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence

Prevention, 2011) and are significantly more likely to experience mental illness as they grow through adulthood (Rigby, 2013). Also, researchers showed that mental health illness can lead to suicide that is linked to bullying in schools (Eckes & Gibbs, 2012; Swearer et al., 2010).

Based on the above, conducting this study added knowledge to the field and may help save lives by promoting safer schools. Having safe schools where students can learn and develop healthy social skills is important for their future. Failing to focus on bullying—one cause of unsafe school environment—or how it can be prevented will decrease the quality of learning. Communities in which students reside may lack understanding of how to readily address the issue. As a result, victims may demonstrate characteristics of school avoidance, poor academic performance, fear, and anxiety (Cornell et al., 2013; Swearer et al., 2010). To this end, the primary question the present study attempted to answer was, how parents whose children experienced school bullying perceived school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family's dynamics. In this study, I brought forth supporting evidence about the roles of parents, teachers, and administrators who may play a role in making schools a safe place and helped bridge the gap in their understanding of bullying. My goal was to strengthen communication among all parties and particularly to identify ways to support parents whose children have been victimized by bullying and how to address their bullying complaints. Last, this study could be useful to practitioners such as school counselors, school psychologists, teachers, and social workers who could use the results to improve the effectiveness of antibullying policies and programs.

Below, I present the background of the problem, a problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions, the theoretical framework, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and a summary of this chapter. I also present a brief reference to Chapter 2, a transition, and broad perspectives and aspects of bullying.

Background

To date, bullying has become a major problem among America's youth (Gourneau, 2012). Each day, thousands of students encounter taunts and humiliation that stemmed from their peers (Essex, 2011). In this study, those who bully are referred to as *bullies or perpetrators*. Approximately 1.5 million school-aged youth between the ages of 12 and 18 reported that they had been victimized in a violent manner while at school (Jeong & Lee, 2013). Furthermore, 75% of U.S. public school principals indicated that one or more violent incidents were reported to the police by their schools, whereas 25% of public schools reported that school bullying was a problem faced by students on a daily or weekly basis (Jeong & Lee, 2013). With what appears to be an epidemic, this problem has gained the attention of many parents, school administrators, and policymakers, and can no longer be ignored as harmless. Bullying is not a rite of passage as children grow (Gourneau, 2012; National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2011; Peguero, 2012).

Another disturbing aspect of the problem of bullying is the effect it has on victims. For example, victims have been known to experience increased risk of internalizing and somatic symptoms such as increased anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress, confusion, lowered/loss of self-esteem and confidence, self-harm and suicidal ideation, general

deterioration in physical health, lowered academic achievement and aspirations, and feelings of alienation while in school such as fearing peers (Essex, 2011; Jeong & Lee, 2013; National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2011; Peguero, 2012). In alignment with this notion, Kasen, Johnson, and Cohen (as cited in Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009) and Hoge, Smit, and Hanson (as cited in Birkett et al., 2009) also asserted that school climates have long been linked with mental health and behavioral problems, self-esteem, and academic outcomes. Therefore, it is essential to understand and address bullying that is rampant in public schools, so that safe and healthy learning environment for all youth can be reestablished (Peguero, 2012).

Researchers found a strong linkage between childhood bullying behavior and subsequent criminal offending after the age of 12 (Jiang, Walsh, & Augimeri, 2011). Bullies were convicted as criminals twice as often as nonbullies up to the age of 18. Childhood bullying has been associated with later violence and substance use among young adults and early intervention to prevent childhood bullying may help reduce other adverse outcomes as a life-long effect (Kim, Catalano, Haggerty, & Abbott, 2011).

Other studies have suggested that school dropout is another factor that has been proven to be associated with bullying. For example, researchers revealed that bullying was the cause of adolescents' dropout from school (Alika, 2012; Townsend, Flisher, Chikobvu, Lombard, & King, 2008). Students who were bullied by their peers in the Delta State of Nigeria showed a significant relationship between bullying and students dropping out from school (Alika, 2012). Bullying in Cape Town, South Africa, was again the cause of high school dropout by students, as they developed fear of school, which, in turn, resulted in absenteeism, and stunted academic progress (Townsend et al., 2008).

These studies provided critical data that can underlay future studies and support the importance of the current study.

However, the literature lacked sufficient studies on parents' perspectives on how their concerns or complaints of their victimized child were handled in schools. Specifically, limited research was available on how parents of a victimized child experienced interactions about bullying with their child's school personnel, and with the application or review of the symbolic interactionism theory (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), which I describe in the Theoretical Framework section. Through this theory, I was able to describe what the parents' perspectives were and the meaning they attached with their experiences, while also being able to discern the parents' respective schools' or school districts' responses to bullying. Most importantly, this study provided insight to ways state, local, or federal governments can strengthen laws, policies, and programs on bullying. The present study also attempted to address the gap concerning the views and effects of victimization and family dynamics (home environment) once victimization by bullying has occurred and parents are aware of the incident(s).

Problem Statement

Bullying is a form of low-level violence that has become epidemic in America's schools (Hazel, 2010; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Gaul (as cited in Williams & Kennedy, 2012) and the U.S. Department of Education (as cited in Williams & Kennedy, 2012) showed that as many as 50% of high school students reported having victimized or bullied their peers or been victimized by their peers. Another study revealed that 88% of students reported having witnessed bullying, and 76.8% mentioned they were victims of bullying at school (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Furthermore, this problem

raises concerns because bullying can cause psychological problems that may persist for a lifetime (Essex, 2011; Rigby, 2013). Once again, victims may be left with low self-esteem, thoughts of suicide or committing suicide, loneliness, depression, increased anxiety, and deterioration in physical health (Essex, 2011; National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2011). Moreover, Cross et al. (2011) asserted that bullying cannot more than seriously damage victimized students socially, physically, or psychologically; bullying can affect students' academic performance as well. Similarly, perpetrators of bullying are at risk for health problems, as well as safety and educational problems, which include injury requiring hospitalization, weapon carrying, setting fires, and runaway episodes. It has also been determined that perpetrators show a higher incidence of mental health problems; are more likely to have low academic competence; are often less happy at school; and are likely to engage in delinquent behavior such as smoking, drinking alcohol, and abusing substances (Cross et al., 2011). Although perpetrators may demonstrate a few of the same symptoms or characteristics as victims, they carry with them additional adverse behaviors that may put others and themselves in danger.

Although many researchers have described the characteristics of victims and bullies and the impact of bullying on them, again, there seems to be a dearth of research that addressed parents' experiences of having a child victimized by school bullying. In other words, parents of victimized youth have been underrepresented in the literature in terms of their perspectives on the stakeholders involved in the bullying and with regard to the school's initiatives and treatment of their victimized children. Again, few authors such as J. Brown, Aalsma, and Ott (2013), Holt, Kantor, and Finkelhor (2009), and

Humphrey and Crisp (2008) explored the parents' experiences and perspectives of bullying; however, these studies did not consider the use of the symbolic interactionism theory (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934) to explain this portion of the phenomena. Consequently, this limitation carries over to parents' perspectives of school administrators, teachers, antibullying policies or programs, and family dynamics, which the current study also explored.

Parents who are aware of their child's victimization may feel strongly compelled to intervene in an attempt to resolve the issue; however, they may experience challenges in the process or in their efforts. For instance, parents who recognized their child had been a victim of bullying often felt grief over the incident and guilt about not being able to prevent or amend it (Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). Parents found little support from a kindergarten teacher, and found staff to be quite defensive, denying that bullying took place; as a result, parents reported feeling angry, powerless, and guilty about their inability to protect their child (Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). In another instance, a parent who reported their child's victimization faced resistance from school officials when trying to resolve the matter; and 10 of the 11 parents in the aftermath experience were left with the option to remove their child from the school or let the child continue to be victimized (J. Brown et al., 2013). Thus, parents may feel disempowered by school administrators as they seek help to protect their child, and, as a result, this may change their home environment—family dynamics.

Researchers must fill the gap in the literature concerning this phenomenon because learning parents' perceptions of the problem of bullying can strengthen the collaboration between families and schools to effectively prevent and intervene in

bullying (Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Duong, 2011). The social implications of the study are that parents' perspectives can aid in understanding the role schools play in dealing with the problem of bullying and in establishing antibullying programs that involve parents. Hence, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of parents whose child was a victim of school bullying and to gain understanding of their beliefs, opinions, emotions, and behaviors, based on their experiences. This purpose supports the notion that the lived experiences of these parents serve as additional insights to the body of literature and knowledge in the field (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002).

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this qualitative research study was to employ the phenomenological research approach to explore the meaning of school bullying among parents of victimized children. In this research, I explored the lived experiences from the perspectives of parents, to increase understanding, through the use of the symbolic interactionism theory (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934) of how parents perceived school administrators, teachers, and antibullying policies or programs that were already in place. The secondary purpose of this qualitative research was to gain further insight on the impact of the family's dynamics when considering parents' experiences and perspectives of school bullying of their child. The goal was to understand what role victimization by bullying plays in the home. In other words, in the present study, I sought to understand the parallels between those who were victims of bullying and its effects in their home environment.

The results from this research provided valuable information for a specific population of parents of children victimized by school bullying and adds to the already

existing body of literature on school bullying and parents' perceptions. Information obtained from parents will help researchers understand the extent to which school administrators and teachers will implement antibullying programs, laws, and policies in their school districts. The information obtained also adds understanding to how bullying at school translates into the homes of the victims. In other words, researchers will be able to better understand the impact or role a child's victimization by bullying has on the family's dynamics. Additionally, this research serves as a bridge to enhance communication among key stakeholders in making continuous efforts to decrease or eliminate school bullying. In this research, I brought to the forefront the issues that serve as barriers to effectively eliminating bullying in American schools. My intent was for this study to create critical conversations with participants that, in turn, may lead to more understanding of the experiences of parents whose children were victims of bullying. I hope these insights will translate into socially informed approaches that schools and policymakers can use to improve current prevention and intervention methods.

Research Questions

The main research question of this study was as follows: How do parents whose children experienced school bullying perceive school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family's dynamics? The subsequent research questions that guided this research follow:

1. How did parents initially experience the victimization of their child from school bullying?
2. How did parents of a child victimized by school bullying go about reporting their child's victimization?

3. What were the feelings of parents of a victimized child of school bullying, after learning of their child's victimization?
4. What types of responses, advocacy, or support did parents of a victimized child of school bullying receive when reporting their child's victimization?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that grounded this study was symbolic interactionism, originally constructed by Mead (1934) and subsequently modified by Blumer (1969), LaRossa and Reitzes (1993), Stryker (2002), Dionysiou and Tsoukas (2013), and Dennis and Martin (2007). Although this sociological perspective derived from Mead's ideas on self and society, it was a student, Blumer, who was responsible for creating the term *symbolic interactionism* and publishing the theory after Mead's death (Collins, 2011; Nelson, 1998). As a devotee of Mead, Blumer formulated a prominent version of the theory by arriving at core principles of meaning, language, and thought that developed into an understanding about the creation of a person's self and socialization in the larger aspect of their community (Nelson, 1998). Also, expanding on Mead's (1934) view, LaRossa and Reitzes asserted that family members react to a situation by how they interpret the situation; and that a person's self-concept is shaped by the reactions of significant others and the perceptions that develop from their reactions.

Stryker's (2002) contribution to this theory was in his work on the structural symbolic interactionism frame and role theory, incorporating the traditional symbolic interactionism concept as well. Stryker posited that roles are expected behaviors associated with the relationships and groups humans form and also complete evaluations of behaviors using normative standards. These roles are structured to acquire certain

behaviors that are guided by subjective meanings. Thus, it is the repeated interactions that develop behavioral expectations from the roles (Stryker, 2002).

Mead (1934) believed that taking on roles was a distinguishing feature of humans; doing so allowed the ability to become a self-object that then emerge from social interaction by taking the roles of others by being able to place oneself in others' position and react toward oneself from that position (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013). In other words, when a person takes on the role of another, him or her also react to certain situations as if he or she is the other person. In following this belief, Dionysiou and Tsoukas (2013) worked to explore how routines are (re)created from within. In other words, "how do individual lines of action become aligned to form repetitive patterns of action (performative aspect?)" (p. 198). Last, in their work with symbolic interactionism theory, Dennis and Martin (2007) proposed that an alternate understanding of structure must be incorporated with the more conventional mainstream understanding of structure in sociology. They believed that the concept of structure should be viewed separately from a sociological aspect and a psychological aspect, for the basic premises of symbolic interactionism (Dennis & Martin, 2007).

I applied the symbolic interactionism theoretical framework to this study because it addresses how interaction of one's social and physical environment can shape the meaning of one's world and self. Hence, the theory provides understanding of how individuals interpret and acquire values and meaning in their social environment (Rank & LeCroy, 1983). In other words, the theory focuses on the subjective meaning of human behavior, based on humans' interactions, rather than on the objective aspects of their social environment. Simply put, people act according to how they define the situation

(Nelson, 1998; Rank & LeCroy, 1983): "Thus behavior is not merely a mechanical response to external stimuli, rather it is constructed creatively and selectively" (Rank & LeCroy, 1983, p. 443).

The symbolic interactionism theoretical framework offered guidance in understanding how parents of a child victimized by school bullying perceived and interpreted existing antibullying school policies or programs, and reactions of school administrators and teachers, because interaction is symbolic and meanings develop through social interaction (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013; Stryker, 2002). Also, the research questions supported the described theoretical framework, in that they helped capture the meaning of school bullying of parents of victimized children.

Equally important is the integration of the symbolic interactionism theory perspective to the research. This approach offered a rich and meaningful description of parents' experiences and perspectives on bullying and generated a theoretical account of what this experience meant to family dynamics. The aforementioned theoretical framework will be further explained in Chapter 2. In that chapter, I will address key assumptions and show how parents' experiences and perspectives of bullying were uniquely suited to answer the research questions.

Nature of the Study

This study was a qualitative study using the phenomenological strategy of inquiry. The phenomenological approach is a strategy of inquiry that researchers use to identify the essence of human experiences of a phenomenon as described by participants (Creswell, 2009). However, this essence is not like the one Moustakas (1994) described as *heuristic research/inquiry,* where researchers must immerse themselves in

participants' lived experiences, are present throughout the process, and gain understanding of the phenomenon with increasing depth. Also, in the heuristic form, the experience brings growing self-awareness and self-knowledge to the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, this study helped to determine how bullying plays a role with family dynamics of the victimized individuals.

For this study to maintain a fixed time frame for research, the aim of the phenomenological approach was to discover the meaning of participants' lived experiences without total immersion (Carter & Carter, 2010; Moustakas, 1994; Wickstrom, 2009). Therefore, in the general sense of applying the phenomenological approach, determining what an experience means for those who have had the experience and are able to deliver a comprehensive description of their experiences provides the researcher with participants' subjective reality of the phenomenon: a concrete representation and general or universal meanings (Carter & Carter, 2010; Moustakas, 1994; Williamson & Hood, 2011). Hence, to obtain participants' subjective reality, the researcher must apply open-ended questioning to generate rich data from participants (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; Williamson & Hood, 2011).

This qualitative study and the use of the phenomenological approach was consistent with understanding how parents experienced school bullying as their child was being victimized. Because the study was mainly concerned with understanding and exploring the lived experiences of the parents, it aligned with determining the possible categories, themes, or patterns that surfaced from their experiences that developed into meanings. Again, the phenomenological approach allowed me to capture the essence of parents' experiences of their child's victimization of school bullying and provide insight

to their subjective meanings in their perceptions of school administrators, teachers, and antibullying policies or programs.

I interviewed six individuals with children who attended elementary school, middle school, and high school in the Montgomery County and Prince George's County area of the State of Maryland. Data developed from participants' responses were analyzed using constant comparison and ongoing coding of data that yielded emerging themes about the meaning of bullying for parents of victimized children.

Operational Definitions and Key Concepts of the Study

Bullying: The use of strength or status to intimidate others, inflict injury, or humiliate and intimidate another person who is weaker (Alika, 2012). It is also characterized by repeated, unprovoked harassment of another person from which the victim is unable to defend himself or herself (Essex, 2011; Gourneau, 2012).

Bystander: A person who witnesses a bullying situation. This person may choose to intervene or not get involved with the bullying situation (Gourneau, 2012).

Covert bullying: An indirect form of aggression demonstrated through gossiping, spreading rumors, ignoring/avoiding, and social exclusion (Young, Boye, & Nelson, 2006; Young, Nelson, Hottle, Warburton, & Young, 2011).

Cyberbullying: A form of bullying that happens through technology (i.e., computers and cell phones) whether anonymously or overtly. This form of electronic communication is also referred to as *electronic harassment* (Gourneau, 2012; Kueny & Zirkel, 2012; Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012).

Overt bullying: A direct, open attempt causing harm to another through physical or verbal aggression (Young et al., 2006, 2011).

Relational aggression: When harm is carried out through manipulation or isolation of a relationship, for example, a peer group (Young et al., 2006, 2011).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations

Assumptions

Based on the nature of this study, I developed five assumptions: (a) I assumed that findings would inform and educate school administrators, teachers, and policymakers on the concerns parents have regarding bullying; (b) Participants would become emotionally upset or frustrated as they explained their experiences; (c) Participants would answer truthfully and provide in-depth information; (d) I would remain unbiased throughout the study; and (e) The literature review would support the research questions and purpose of the study. First, I assumed that with a qualitative phenomenological design, key stakeholders such as school administrators, teachers, and policymakers would gain valuable information regarding school protocols and policies to address bullying, which was one of the goals of this study. Second, parent participants may have become emotional or frustrated during interviews due to the nature of the topic and their connection and bond with their child. Third, because obtaining in-depth knowledge and experience from participants was vital and was the aim of the research, participants would be forthcoming and honest in their responses, as they might have felt a sense of hope by doing so. Fourth, asking participants open-ended questions and bracketing myself would guide me to target participants' subjective responses and meaning of the phenomenon without allowing bias to interfere. The fifth assumption, critical to the meaning of the study, was that the literature review would support the research questions

and purpose of the study, because it would show that the gap in the literature had been clearly identified.

These assumptions show the characteristics of qualitative research, where the researcher makes values known in the study according to the assumptions in this case, aiming to remain unbiased. This is best described as the *axiological* assumption—where researchers "position themselves" in their study (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). Because multiple ideas of realities derive from participants, it is important that a researcher not only embrace those perspectives, but also refrain from including personal judgment about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Wood, 2011). The *methodological* assumptions, which are characterized by the researcher's inductive logic and use of emerging design, illustrated the process (i.e., in-depth information, supportive literature review, and study implication) of the research (Creswell, 2013). Another type of assumption demonstrated here is the *ontological* assumption, such that the researcher relates possible issues (i.e., emotional or frustrated responses) "to the nature of reality and its characteristics" (p. 20). These assumptions are necessary in the context of the study.

Limitations

One limitation of this research was the use of only parents as the main sample population. A larger sample consisting of teachers and school administrators would most likely provide transferability. Another limitation of this study was that data were only collected from parents who resided in suburban school-district areas and not from city or rural locations; findings may not be generalized to all schools in Maryland. Last, some may consider the small sample size of six to be a limitation; however, a qualitative

phenomenological approach is especially flexible and, rather than considering the number of participants, researchers seek in-depth richness of the cases (Patton, 2002).

A bias that could have influenced the study's outcome was my personal perception of the school data collected. Having a certain opinion about the schools' climate and culture might influence how I interpreted participants' responses and subjective meaning of the phenomenon. However, being aware of such bias in the beginning of the study helped me obtain accurate information from participants (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). Researchers must acknowledge their own perspectives while also taking serious responsibility to authentically communicate the perspectives of individuals they encountered during their investigation (Patton, 2002).

It is possible that including teachers or school administrators in the sample population would not only support the concept of triangulation, where data are collected from several sources (Patton, 2002), it would address the limitation of parents being the only sample population. Also, expanding the study's locations to rural/other district areas in Maryland would also help address the limitation presented by the location.

Scope and Delimitations

The study was bound to parents of victimized children of school bullying in the State of Maryland. The study considered parents' interactions and perceptions of school administrators, teachers, and antibullying policies or programs. The study's population was limited to parents because minimal research had addressed this aspect of bullying, whereas aspects of bullies and victims have been extensively explored. Educators have great interest in understanding parents' interactions with and perceptions of school administrators, teachers, and antibullying policies or programs, because parents'

perspectives provide additional knowledge of how some school districts respond to the issue of bullying (once parents make them aware of concerns). This study was also limited to parents whose children were in elementary, middle, and high school, to give me as the researcher a broader range in understanding bullying from all educational levels. Although a heuristic strategy would have been suitable for this study as well, I selected a phenomenological inquiry so I would not run the risk of bringing my bias into the study by full emersion from my own experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). Last, I narrowed the scope of the study to a phenomenological approach rather than an ethnographic approach because the study did not focus on a specific group's experience and its collective meaning, but rather on individual experiences (Creswell, 2009, 2013).

Findings may not be transferable, such that they can be applied to a wider population (Shenton, 2004). Because this study was limited to suburban areas in the State of Maryland, and because data were not gathered from all ethnicities, generalizing the results to other populations risks the credibility of the study, where adoption of the methods may not be congruent with qualitative inquiry (Shenton, 2004).

Significance of the Study

This research study is important to the field of human services because it contributes to the already-existing body of literature in school bullying by addressing the underresearched area of parents' perceptions of their experiences as their children were victimized. The study generated new or additional knowledge for school personnel (i.e., school counselors, psychologists, and administrators), policy makers, parents, and other human-services professionals, and could strengthen the lines of communication among

these individuals. Policy makers will be better informed on how to improve policies, laws, and programs on local, state, and federal levels, leading to more effective ways to address bullying complaints from parents of victimized children. Also, results of this study support professional practice by providing greater insights on school bullying that could enhance the current methods used to address this problem in new ways.

In addition to the aforementioned description as to why this study is important, findings from this study promote positive social change such that teachers, parents, school administrators, policy makers, and other human-services professionals can join forces to ensure schools remain safe and secure, as was originally presumed by families, community leaders, and the courts (Essex, 2011). Specifically, teachers and school administrators can become more aware of factors that may leave some parents feeling hopeless and isolated (which could result in having a negative perception on how the school managed bullying) when trying to be the voice for their victimized child of school bullying. Through this education and awareness, parents, especially, can become empowered to develop initiatives for their local school districts, state, or for a national agenda that could contribute to general school policies on bullying. The potential relevance of this study to society can ultimately create stronger communities where students do not feel compelled to commit suicide, will perform better in school, and will gain the greatest possible social and emotional achievements (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2011).

Summary

In sum, this chapter considered the effects of bullying and the unprecedented attention it has received around the world, especially in the United States. Some effects

linked to bullying include suicide, poor academic performance, depression, fear, anxiety, and mental illness. The sensitivity of bullying has been studied extensively; however, this qualitative phenomenological research expanded on the knowledge of bullying by exploring parents' perceptions, employing the symbolic interactionism theory (Blumer 1969; Mead 1934). The perceptions of parents with regard to school administrators, teachers, antibullying policies or programs, and their family dynamics will enrich understanding of their subjective meaning of bullying. Most importantly, their perceptions will bring understanding of how certain school districts respond to bullying. In other words, findings revealed that schools may not be implementing antibullying policies, laws, or programs in the most effective ways after receiving parents' complaints.

The literature review section, Chapter 2, provides an examination of the current literature associated with school bullying and the gap related to school bullying and parents. Chapter 3 includes in-depth information about the research design used to carry out this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the study, whereas Chapter 5 provides a summary, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The majority of the research to date has used empirical studies to explore the characteristics and effects of bullying on victims and bullies, with particular focus on victims. However, relatively little research has addressed the perceptions of parents of victims with the use of an applicable theoretical framework/perspective. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to apply a qualitative phenomenological approach to gain a more comprehensive perspective of the experiences and meaning of school bullying among parents whose children were victims of bullying, while using the symbolic interactionism theory (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934) to add new insight on the topic of bullying. This section begins with the prevalence and nature of bullying, how the articles for review were obtained (found in the Literature Search Strategy section), and an explanation of the theoretical foundation of the symbolic interactionism theory that guided the present study. The description of this theory also includes a discussion of some theorists who viewed symbolic interactionism as an interpretive approach to understand human behaviors. A review of the following domains that have been previously researched under the scope of bullying follow: bullying experiences of parents; teachers' and school administrators' perceptions/roles of bullying and prevention programs; parents' role in and reaction to bullying; parents' involvement and of awareness of bullying; prevention programs; peer mediation; parenting styles, culture and bullying; and socioeconomic issues and bullying. I also include a summary of the major themes identified in the literature and the gap in the present study.

Youth in America, especially, are undergoing a social problem of bullying. Because of its pervasiveness, it is a public health issue that has garnered considerable attention in academic, social, and political areas. Its prevalence in schools is seen as a worldwide problem (Dresler-Hawke & Whitehead, 2009). Of U.S. students, 24% to 49% reported being regular victims of bullying, whereas 19% to 31% were bullies (Hazel, 2010). Also, a study on elementary school students and socioemotional problems suggested that 10% to 15% of students in Grades 3 to 6 were victims of bullying at least once a week (Raskauskas, 2010). These findings suggested that researchers must continue to explore this topic to gain clear understanding of the possible layers that may exist in this problem, looking beyond its effects to its manifestation as a threat to the social, emotional, and mental development and learning of victims (Essex, 2011; Hazel, 2010; National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2011).

Furthermore, recent studies often explored the experiences of parents and effects of bullying in elementary, middle, and high schools (J. Brown et al., 2013; Cross et al., 2011; Holt et al., 2009; Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). These researchers determined that children can develop the behavior of bullying as early as the elementary school years and examined the role parents played to protect their children. Another study determined that understanding the perceptions of parents about bullying is an important facet that should be given attention (Waasdorp et al., 2011). According to these studies, further investigation should be conducted on the experiences of parents of children victimized by school bullying. The literature review supports the phenomenon of meaning for this population, supports these findings, and summarizes what has been discerned in research

on school bullying. The literature review also presents related topics that warrant future research.

Literature Search Strategy

To obtain a broad perspective and to do an exhaustive search of the literature on school bullying, I used Walden University's databases from EBSCOhost such as PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, PsycEXTRA, PsycCRITIQUES, SocINDEX, ERIC-Education, ProQuest Central-Dissertations & Thesis (i.e., Walden University's Dissertations), Academic Search Complete/Premier, Education Research Complete, Education from SAGE, Education Research Starters, and the Teacher Reference Center. I used the following keywords: *school bullying, school bullying* and *America, bullying, parents,* and *teachers' perceptions, bullying* and *elementary teachers, peer mediation, peer mediation, bullying,* and *parents, bullying* and *parents, school bullying* and *teacher's responses, parenting styles* and *bullying,* and *parents, bullying,* and *socioeconomic status.* From these terms, I obtained various studies to understand the basis of school bullying and to provide a foundation to focus the current study. The majority of the articles used in this review derived from the databases of PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, SocINDEX, and ERIC. In cases where I found little research in an identified area about the perceptions of parents of a victimized child, I searched further using the keywords *parenting styles; bullying, parents, bullying; socioeconomic status, peer mediation; peer mediation, bullying;* and *parents*. I examined these articles, representing research on the various facets of bullying, for content, method, and relevance to the current study.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework for this study was the symbolic interactionism approach developed by Mead in 1934. Blumer (1969) was responsible for its further development into a theoretical perspective with concentration on how meaning and identity are formed. Symbolic interactionism is an interpretive and social constructivist approach/assumption that emphasizes individuals seeking understanding of the world in which they interact in through work and life (Creswell, 2009). Thus, individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences, which then lead to the meanings attached to certain objects or things (Creswell, 2009, 2013).

Furthermore, Blumer's (1969) work on symbolic interactionism identified three underlying assumptions: (a) people assign meanings to things and respond toward things based on these meanings; (b) the meanings of such things are from the social interaction that people have with each other; (c) and these meanings develop through an interpretive process that people apply when they handle things as they encounter them. In previous applications, researchers (e.g., Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013; Nelson, 1998; Rank & LeCroy, 1983; Stryker, 2002) have expanded these assumptions with the notion that "symbolic" is more than symbols; rather, it refers to the basic premise or assumption that people live in a world of physical and social objects that have no universal meaning. It is solely from their daily social interactions with these objects that people assign meaning to the objects (Prus, 1996; Swan & Bowers, 1998). Generally, social scientists who apply this theory are able to learn how people make sense of their experiences—their process of interaction (Prus, 1996). It is through this definition that, for instance, LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) explored the notion that family members' reaction to a situation rests on

how members interpret the situation. In other words, each family member may react differently to a situation, given an individual interpretation of the circumstance.

This theoretical framework was a valuable approach for the current study because it explored the phenomenon of meaning. Symbolic interactionism theory brings forth individual or group meaning of people's social reality. Therefore, a methodology incorporating symbolic interactionism was appropriate for research that explored the meaning parents of elementary, middle, and high school students who were victims of school bullying in two Maryland school districts (i.e., Montgomery County Public Schools and Prince Georges County Public Schools) assigned to school administrators, teachers, and antibullying school policies or programs. Additionally, this theory related to the present study because it aimed to aided understanding of how the experience and interaction with schools due to bullying was interpreted by parents of a victimized child. Last, this theory was suitable for this study because it supported the research questions, aiming to understand the process to which parents were exposed when addressing their child's victimization of bullying.

The next section is the first domain this literature review provides of background knowledge in the area of school bullying. The first review of the literature will concentrate on parents' experience of having a child victimized by school bullying.

Parents' Experience of Bullying

Humphrey and Crisp (2008) conducted research with a sample of four parents (three mothers and one father; three married and one single) from ages 32 to 36 years to understand their experiences of having a victimized child of bullying in kindergarten. Participants were interviewed based on five core questions. The researchers applied a

snowball-sampling technique to gather participants who ensured a purposeful sample of the population. Snowball sampling allowed participants to assist researchers in recruiting other participants who shared the same phenomena.

Interviews of each participant lasted 20 to 30 minutes in duration with the following questions: (a) How would you define bullying?; (b) How did you come to learn that your child was involved in bullying?; (c) How did your child's experience of bullying come to affect you as a parent/guardian?; (d) How did you support your child and other family members?; and (e) What support or help is needed by parents/guardians when their child is involved in bullying? The findings from this study revealed that even though parents expected teachers to know how to handle the bullying situations that surfaced, that was not the case when parents learned that kindergarten teachers were unaware of the bullying until mentioned by parents, with some teachers denying that the incident had ever occurred (Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). Also, they disliked the terms *bullying, bully,* or *victim,* preferring, instead, to use the terms *inappropriate* or *unacceptable* behavior. This left parents feeling sad, angry, hurt, isolated, powerless, and guilty for not being able to protect their child (Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). Based on these findings, there is reason to question if parents' perceptions of school administrators, teachers, and antibullying school policies or programs are not valued or respected by parents of a victimized child of bullying.

The Humphrey and Crisp (2008) study was similar to the current study in methods/techniques and approach (i.e., qualitative, interviews, and snowball sampling). The authors explored the phenomenon of parents with a victimized child of bullying. However, a limitation they presented was the small sample size of just four participants.

Creswell (2007) and Rudestam and Newton (2007) suggested that most qualitative studies should have five participants as the minimum number of participants, especially when using a phenomenological design.

J. Brown et al. (2013) used similar qualitative methodologies and approaches to explore the experiences of middle-school parents as they attempted to protect their bullied child. The researchers used a qualitative phenomenology approach to provide an in-depth analysis of the phenomena. They interviewed a purposeful sample of 11 middle-school parents face-to-face with 16 questions as a guide for a semistructured interview with subsequent telephone follow-ups. These interviews were taped and transcribed for later analysis. Participants were all White and were living in Indiana, a state that had passed an antibullying law in July, 2005. Five parents resided in rural residences, four in suburban residences, and one in an urban residence; thus the parents' youth attended different school districts. There were 10 female participants and one male participant. Of the 11 participants, researchers interviewed both a mother and father, whereas the other nine participants were mothers.

Three parent stages emerged: discovering, reporting, and living with the aftermath (J. Brown et al., 2013). The findings indicated that parents made efforts to keep their youth from being bullied before bringing their child's victimization to the attention of school officials in the *discovery* stage. Parents who were aware of their child being bullied in elementary school were able to recognize the reemergence of the same bullies in their child's middle school; therefore, they were prepared to start the helping process for their victimized child. The study also found that some parents did not find school officials' interventions helpful, which made them feel uncertain about whom they should

report to when their children were bullied; parents were directed by the school secretary to speak to a counselor or student-service representative, even though these school personnel are not typically associated with school discipline. Of the 11 parents in the study, school officials told 10 they had no way to help. The researchers captured this information in the *reporting* stage (J. Brown et al., 2013).

In the *aftermath* stage, findings showed that one parent also felt victimized, and four parents reported their child needed counseling, whereas another parent was transporting their child to the hospital for their child's nerves (J. Brown et al., 2013). Some parents were able to remove their youth from the middle school in hopes of a new and positive beginning. Results from the study justified the main research question of the current study, suggesting that parents' negative experience may find school administrators, teachers, and antibullying school policies and programs ineffective.

This study showed strength in areas such as the number of participants queried, number of diverse school districts, and follow-up telephone calls (J. Brown et al., 2013). The limitation of the study lies in the limited racial/ethnicity (i.e., all White), and gender (one father and 10 mothers) representation of the people interviewed. Minority parents may have a different understanding of how to respond to their child's bullying victimization; also, several fathers may have a different understanding of their child's bullying (J. Brown et al., 2013).

Using a slightly different concept and methodology (e.g., qualitative and random sample selection), James (2012) explored bullying among parents and teachers. Although this study presented different approaches, research findings were similar in nature compared to the other studies (J. Brown et al., 2013; Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). The

James study explored the day-to-day experiences of parent–teacher bullying at an American international school using a qualitative approach. researcher used 12 randomly selected parents chosen from 35 who were willing and available to share their experiences of bullying. This researcher also used a purposeful and convenience sampling to locate participants (James, 2012).

Three research questions guided the interviews and yielded data/themes from the participants:

> [(1)] In what ways and forms is teacher-parent bullying characterized at this school? (2) How does bullying between teachers and parents affect other stakeholders in the school?, and (3) What policies need to be developed and implemented to reduce bullying between teachers and parents?" (James, 2012, pp. 120–121)

Each interview lasted 1 hour; James audiotaped and digitally recorded each interview after obtaining permission from participants and transcribed the interviews for accuracy, as in the J. Brown et al. (2013) study.

To answer the first research question, the author reported that parents shared different perspectives of what bullying meant (James, 2012). For example, some parents felt that because teachers may have authority in work-related power like grading, and rapport with school administrators, they felt bullied by teachers when it came to safety expectations and requirements. Some teachers bully parents by not rewarding their children for good performance or behavior or exclude them from photographs in school newsletters, but recognize friends' children. Teachers who practice bullying may also give a parent's child a lower grade when school administrators consider the child a bully.

Other parents believed that they should be able to express their concerns, as they pay their child's tuition; hence, they expected better responses from the school they chose for their child to attend. Gender was also an issue in that boys in the study appeared more aggressive than girls, most teachers were men, and parents having daily interactions with the school were women, leading to a perception that teachers complicated bullying issues (James, 2012).

For the second research question, findings revealed that teachers were inflexible or not as open to receiving parents' suggestions; that translated as dispute-related aggression (James, 2012). Parents were found to be frustrated and angry with teachers and especially with headmasters, as parents perceived them as not taking responsibility to address concerns about the children. Some parents believed it to be the teachers' and headmasters' responsibility to stop violence or parent–teacher bullying, and that they ignored situations when parents and children were bullied. In summary, parents perceived school headmasters or management staff to be ineffective and, therefore, perceived them negatively (James, 2012).

The third research question findings showed that parents have little regard for policy developments like an antibullying week for students, when headmasters ignored clear bullying between parents and teachers (James, 2012). Although the school had an annual antibullying week, parents saw few changes in the school's social environment. School relationships left parents feeling dissatisfied, as they were unable to reach the school council due to the headmaster's inaccessibility (James, 2012). Once again, findings suggest that schools are not providing parents with the kind of support and attention parents need when it comes to their children's well-being. In turn, parents may

find that internal parties in their child's schools might be helpless or unresponsive to their needs.

In contrast to the aforementioned studies, a qualitative investigation by Athanasiades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis (2010) found that secondary students did not only avoid revealing bullying and victimization to their teachers, but also to their parents. The study aimed to discover the interpretations and experiences of bullying in Greek schools, focusing on gender similarities and differences. In a study of 50 boys and 45 girls, aged 15 or 16 years, about 30% of students who participated in the study believed teachers and parents had not tried to stop bullying at their schools and portrayed them as indifferent and ineffective. In fact, students preferred to discuss bullying with their peers and obtain support from them rather than having parental involvement. Based on the interpretative-phenomenological analysis researchers applied, the findings from this study provided reasons to pursue further studies on the effectiveness of peer mediation with bullying, and antibullying-intervention programs that employ a whole-school approach that aims to reestablish trust and safety among students, teachers, and parents in the school environment (Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010).

Overall, the aforementioned studies in this section spoke to parents' dissatisfaction with schools' responses to bullying. These findings also suggested that parents are not necessarily always aware or knowledgeable of how to address their child's victimization; and the teachers may also be unaware of bullying; therefore parents perceive teachers as ineffective in helping students faced with bullying. The present study further conveyed the underlying meaning of parents' internal experiences (with schools) of having a victimized child, through the lens of the symbolic interactionism theory.

Hence, more research must be conducted to obtain greater insight on what is happening internally for parents whose children are being bullied, so researchers will also understand the effects of victimization on the family's dynamics. The next section of the literature review explores the role parents played, and their reaction to bullying, based on their knowledge or awareness of their child's victimization.

Parents' Role/Reaction to Bullying

Waasdorp et al. (2011) used a different methodology and offered a different view of parents' perceptions of bullying. This study used a quantitative approach with 773 parents of victimized students who were enrolled in 93 school from elementary through high school-aged students through an online survey, to examine the association between parents' perceptions of the school's social climate and their responses to their children's victimization. Parents' perception of their victimized child's school climate aligned with parents' responses to the school system. Parents with a positive outlook or view of the school's social climate were less likely to contact the teacher and administrator or to engage in talking to their child about their victimization, as they felt the school was safe and would handle the issue effectively. In addition, parents' perception of the social climate, and responses depended on the forms of victimization (i.e., harmful/direct or indirect) and the child's age: the less favorably parents perceived the school's social climate, the stronger the effects were for direct victimization, resulting in an increased likelihood of contacting the school. The younger the child, the more satisfied parents were with the school's social climate and the school's intervention plans (Waasdorp et al., 2011).

Future studies using the same quantitative methodology should look at factors that lead parents to believe their child's school climate is either favorable or unfavorable, so that involvement and open communication about victimization between parents and school personnel will be encouraged and enhanced. By this, "researchers and educators may understand how parents perceive the issue of bullying and the ways in which they respond to their child's victimization" (Waasdorp et al., 2011, p. 324). The Waasdorp et al. (2011) study suggested that parents react to their child's victimization according to their perceptions of their child's school culture/atmosphere. This notion aligns with the present study in that I worked to understand how parents respond and report their child's victimization.

Equally important, students' perceptions of their family dynamics may influence resilience after bullying victimization has occurred. For example, Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt, and Arseneault (2010) conducted research on the role of families in promoting resilience in their children, following bullying victimization in primary school. These researchers used a sample of 1,116 twin pairs and their families using mothers' and children's' reports to examine bullying victimization. They also employed mothers' and teachers' reports to measure children's emotional and behavioral adjustment at 10 and 12 years of age.

Researchers used reports and interviews from mothers to obtain measures of protective factors in homes, including maternal warmth, sibling warmth, and positive atmosphere in homes (Bowes et al., 2010). Maternal and sibling warmth were important in bullied children but not their counterparts (i.e., unbullied children) in promoting emotional and behavioral adjustment. In other words, children who were bullied who

come from a loving family were less likely to be at risk for later emotional and behavioral problems, as other authors (Maunder & Tattersall, 2010; Mishna, Pepler, & Wiener, 2006) have revealed. This study concluded that having a warm parent–child and sibling relationship could build resilience to bullying victimization. Although children may have fallen victim in the beginning, they are no longer considered a victim, due to their resiliency to adverse emotional and behavioral outcomes (Bowes et al., 2010).

The Bowes et al. (2010) study supported and suggested that school-based intervention programs should build a bridge with families for positive results such as the ones found in this study. In this respect, schools may find it beneficial to establish healthy communication styles with families to be prepared to handle issues like bullying. This kind of relationship could play a crucial role in how parents perceive school administrators, teachers, and antibullying policies and programs.

The studies mentioned above explored parents' reactions to bullying and the components of the family dynamics and bullying; however, a need remained for better understanding of what parents' internal experiences with bullying mean to them, with a closer look at symbolic interactionism theory. Also, in an effort to understand the meanings parents of children victimized by bullying attached to their experiences, it is equally important to understand the meanings they associated with their family's dynamics, due to their children's victimization. Looking at an opposite angle, next, the literature will lend insight to the perceptions or roles of teachers and school administrators on bullying, and on some of the prevention programs that are available to schools.

Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions/Roles of Bullying and Prevention Programs

Bauman and Del Rio (2006) explored the types of interventions preservice teachers would use in cases when a student experienced physical bullying, verbal bullying, and relational bullying. This study used six written vignettes that described school-bullying incidents to gather the responses of participants. Researchers queried 82 undergraduate students in a teacher-education program. The findings from this research included the following: relational bullying was rated the least serious type of bullying among respondents; participants expressed the least empathy for victims who experienced relational bullying and were least likely to intervene in bullying incidents that took this form. Participants also proposed they would use the least severe forms of action to intervene with perpetrators and victims of relational bullying when compared to physical and verbal bullying. This study showed that teachers responded to bullying based on their interpretation of bullying. Ultimately, researchers concluded that schools tend to respond to physical bullying and some verbal bullying but dismiss relational or indirect bullying. However, research suggested incorporating bullying into the curriculum in teacher-preparation programs may result in different responses toward relational bullying in future studies (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006).

Additionally, studies by Young et al. (2006) and Young et al. (2011) showed the harmful effects of relational bullying on bullies/perpetrators and victims. They concluded that relational bullying/aggression should receive the same attention as other forms of bullying. The preservice teachers in Bauman and Del Rio's (2006) study may have felt that relational bullying was less serious than physical or verbal bullying because it is

difficult to identify in the school environments because of its covert nature (Young et al., 2006, 2011).

Furthermore, it is likely that the results of Bauman and Del Rio's (2006) study could influence how parents who have a child victimized by bullying perceive teachers. For instance, if a parent has a child who experienced relational bullying and was ignored by teachers, it is highly possible that parents would perceive teachers, school administrators, and antibullying school policies and programs as ineffective, similar to results from the aforementioned studies (J. Brown et al., 2013; Humphrey & Crisp, 2008).

Still, Maunder and Tattersall's (2010) study on how staff experienced their roles in relation to bullying and bullying intervention showed that teachers overlooked covert forms of bullying, but immediately sought to resolve instances of overt physical bullying. Depending on the severity or complexity of the bullying, teachers either passed the information along the chain of command or chose to ignore the incident. Despite these findings, the authors concluded that the quality of relationship staff shared with pupils, parents, and senior staff, and colleagues positively impacted the way they identified and addressed bullying.

This understanding led me to conclude that schools' responses to parents' concerns could vary among parents whose children experienced bullying; a concept the present study explored and attempted to understand. The school climate and organizational system of the school supported these relationships as well (Maunder & Tattersall, 2010). In other words, the school's culture was likely an influential factor on how bullying was addressed. This supported the authors' suggestion that bullying should

be viewed in relation to other influences in the school environment and not just treated in isolation (Maunder & Tattersall, 2010).

Like Bauman and Del Rio's (2006) study, Yoon and Kerber (2003) examined teachers' attitudes toward verbal bullying, physical bullying, and social exclusion, which Young et al. (2006, 2011) referred to as relational aggression. Yoon and Kerber also investigated the level of teacher intervention for the three different types of bullying. The results of their study supported the findings of Bauman and Del Rio's (2006) study in that preservice teachers viewed relational bullying or social exclusion as less severe and were likely to intervene when bullying manifested as verbal and physical aggression. Yoon and Kerber's findings also showed that teachers were less sympathetic to students who encountered social-exclusion bullying and were less likely to become involved or to ignore the situation, but would rather have the bully and the victim talk to each other about their problems. The results from this study suggested that social-exclusion bullying is perceived as less of a concern to teachers.

In contrast, Young et al. (2006, 2011) deemed relational aggression or social-exclusion harmful and determined that schools should consider it to be serious. Such studies may support reasons parents' perceive schools as ineffective in other studies (J. Brown et al., 2013; Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). Based on these results, Yoon and Kerber (2003) lent support to other studies of parents' experiences of bullying and their perceptions of schools. With more studies on bullying prevention and intervention programs and training, future studies may help improve the levels of involvement and enforcement in bullying prevention by school personnel.

Marshall, Varjas, Meyers, Graybill, and Skoczylas (2009) conducted a similar study to that of Bauman and Del Rio (2006), examining teachers' responses to bullying. Using a sample of 30 fourth- through eighth-grade teachers, of which 78% had advanced degrees, the researchers studied teachers who averaged 12 years of experience. The authors considered all the teachers who participated in this study to be highly qualified in their areas of expertise. They initially gathered the sample of 30 teachers through convenience sampling; 25 teachers volunteered during faculty meetings, and they selected the remaining five through snowball sampling, by asking those who initially volunteered to participate to help refer additional teachers who were not present at the faculty meetings. Marshall et al. conducted individual in-depth interviews with participants using a self-reported two-dimensional model with four response types: (a) constructive-direct, (b) constructive-indirect, (c) punitive-direct, and (d) punitive-indirect. The study found, in contrast to previous studies, that teachers did not ignore bullying situations (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; J. Brown et al., 2013; Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). The findings from this study provided relevance for further studies in understanding demographic factors (i.e., gender, age, district area, and race) that may influence teachers' responses to bullying. For example, participants in this study were highly qualified and experienced teachers, whereas Bauman and Del Rio studied preservice teachers in a teacher-education program, with no experience or certifications. The Marshall et al. study is relevant to the present study in that understanding teachers' responses to bullying may help researchers determine parents' perspectives on schools policies and programs about bullying.

Researchers Kennedy, Russom, and Kevorkian (2012) found, in their quantitative study exploring differences between teachers' and administrators' perceptions of bullying, statistically significant differences between the perceptions of teachers and administrators about their role in bullying prevention. For example, teachers felt strongly that educators played an important role in bullying prevention, whereas administrators felt more comfortable communicating with parents whose child had been victimized. Teachers also felt a greater need for increased bullying-prevention training. Teachers preferred to prevent the issue of bullying from occurring than waiting to address it after it had already occurred (Kennedy et al., 2012).

Future researchers must consider the influential factors that contributed to teachers' greater concern and desire to implement bullying prevention and training programs. The results may help in understanding parents' experiences and perceptions of school administrators and antibullying policies and programs. This study also aligned with the present study in that teachers' awareness of and involvement in the importance of bullying may have determined parents' perceptions of schools and how bullying was experienced.

Equally important is the study conducted by Sahin (2010). In this study, Sahin explored teachers' perceptions of student-related violence in Trabzon, Turkey between 2006 and 2007. Using a qualitative research approach, with a case-study method, the researcher conducted semistructured interviews with 10 teachers who worked in 10 different high schools. This approach and method allowed the researcher to obtain an in-depth view and deep understanding of the experiences of bullying from teachers' perspectives (Sahin, 2010). Results from this study showed that teachers strongly

perceived bullying as “demanding rights through violence” and “brutality,” with one who perceived it to be “emotional/psychological hurting” (p. 132). Teachers believed that the causes of bullying were students’ socioeconomic level, family, visual media, and environmental factors. Some also thought cultural degeneration and the Internet were factors in bullying (Sahin, 2010)

Teachers believed bullying could be stopped in their schools; some believed that establishing effective communication with students through seminars, teacher–parent meetings, providing a sense of responsibility, teamwork activities, one-to-one interactions, and watching educative films about bullying would help eliminate the issue (Sahin, 2010). This study showed the level of understanding teachers appeared to have about bullying and what their role should be as teachers. Hence, the author suggested teachers could play a role in bullying prevention by participating in bullying-prevention and intervention projects that can effectively educate them about bullying. Teacher trainees can also benefit from participation in such projects. Bullying cannot be solved by one person, but a group of persons like teachers, parents, students, and school administrators working together can solve the problem (Sahin, 2010). Making a collaborative effort in preventing or providing intervention on bullying will require effective communication and responses to the issue. Such effective communication and collaboration is likely to help in understanding the roles played by school administrators and teachers when addressing parents’ complaints about bullying.

Mishna (2004) conducted a qualitative study on the perspectives of victimized children in Grades 4 and 5, including their parents and educators in their school. The majority of families who participated in the study were single parents from a low-

socioeconomic bracket of subsidized dwellings. Mishna conducted a semistructured interview with 61 children, a parent of each child, and the child's teacher, vice principal, and principal. Findings from this study illustrated that participants found it confusing and complex to determine what constituted a bullying incident. Specifically, teachers and parents struggled to determine whether certain incidents related to a power imbalance among peers. For instance, one teacher's response was, "It can be very hard to decide whether it really is a bullying situation, whether it's one up, one down, or 50–50" (Mishna, 2004, p. 238). Another teacher did not consider a student to be a victim of bullying, as the students had friends and peers who liked the student, even though the student complained of being called names. One mother suggested to her daughter that the boy who said hurtful things and touched her daughter's chest only did that because he liked her—it is a "normal part of growing up" (Mishna, 2004, p. 238). This notion is similar to that of a teacher who also believe bullying was "part of growing up" and that it was actually good for teaching students how to deal with their controlling and manipulative peers (p. 238).

The Mishna (2004) study showed that parents found it difficult to understand a bullying situation, especially when it occurred between students who their children considered to be friends. Their child's decision to continue a friendship with those who bullied their child led them to believe that the behavior/interaction may not have been a bullying incident (Mishna, 2004). Although the researcher mentioned that one of the methods applied was obtaining the perspectives of the vice principal and principal during interviews, Mishna did not present results from their responses in the interviews.

Mishna (2004) suggested that the definition of bullying is unclear among students, teachers, and parents, thereby making it difficult to identify "true" bullying. If school officials/educators and parents are not able to clearly define bullying for their schools, it will be challenging to effectively address the issue. Having consensus among parents, teachers, and students will not only change their responses to bullying, but also will lay the foundation for intervention projects in which they can collaborate to make their schools safer and friendlier. Also, this unclear definition of bullying between parents and teachers is a leading factor in understanding parents' perceptions of schools when it comes to their child's victimization and how it is addressed by schools.

Jordan and Austin's (2012) review of the literature supported the notion that parents and educators must work together to eliminate bullying in schools. Their review led them to believe that bullying must be addressed from an ecological perspective, involving the child. This approach of social ecology requires a view of the micro-, meta-, and macrolevels, including parents and educators, as well (Jordan & Austin, 2012). For example, Christenson and Sheridan (as cited in Jordan & Austin, 2012) found that parent–educator partnerships have been mostly applied in cyberbullying. They offered the example of the case of a Missouri mother and daughter who went to court due to their joint participation in the bullying of a 13-year-old adolescent, Megan Meier, which led to Meier's suicide in 2008 (Megan Meier Foundation, 2007). Jordan and Austin's review also led them to previous studies (i.e., Burk, Loeber, & Birmaher, 2002; Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000; Reid, Eddy, Fetrow, & Stoolmiller, 1999; Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001) revealing that such partnerships have been beneficial in children's social skills by showing a decline in behavior problems. Jordan and Austin suggested that

parent–educator partnerships are highly important in proactively responding to bullying and violence in school environments. Furthermore, they concluded that having parent–educator commitment in addressing bullying can serve as a role model to zero bullying by setting clear classroom guidelines against the behavior/act while fostering praise, support, and encouragement to students.

Based on Jordan and Austin's (2012) review, understanding the value of this concept is crucial because it means parents and educators are in agreement, and consistency in addressing bullying can be demonstrated whether at home and in school. Having the involvement of parents and students in the issue of bullying might bring better understanding of how this type of interaction may influence perceptions that parents have of schools when their child has been faced with bullying victimization.

More importantly, Blackburn, Dulmus, Theriot, and Sowers (2004) examined the communication patterns between children, parents, and school personnel about bullying in a rural public school setting in the southeastern United States that housed students in grades Kindergarten–8. Blackburn et al. surveyed a convenience sample of 494 individuals. Of the 494 participants, 230 were parents, 72 were school personnel, and 192 were students. Findings from this study showed that parents, school personnel, and students have engaged in discussing bullying at some point. Specifically, some bullied students were able to confide in their parents and teachers in cases where their peers bullied them. Moreover, the study showed that parents and school personnel communicated in both directions: parents reported their child being bullied at school and school personnel made parents aware of their child bullying others after speaking to the child's bullying behavior at school (Blackburn et al., 2004).

Although this study was able to provide understanding of the flow of communication patterns among students, parents, and school personnel, it failed to mention whether their communication impacted the school's bullying level (Blackburn et al., 2004). For instance, it begs the question of whether there was more or less bullying in the school based on the communication patterns described by the researchers. Future studies should build on that area in rural and urban locations. Promoting safer or nonviolent school environments will take the act of communication described in this study. In fact, such communication could be key to effective intervention or prevention programs against bullying (Blackburn et al., 2004). This kind of communication could also help researchers learn how it played a role in schools' approaches to addressing bullying; and whether parents whose children were victims of bullying found the communication style effective.

The research studies presented in this section offered an alternative view of antibullying school programs. I included these studies to illustrate various approaches stakeholders can use to reduce or eliminate school bullying. Also, the studies revealed how some teachers experienced bullying. These studies also supported the fact that the literature does not provide enough studies that are directly concerned with parents' experiences of their child's victimization of bullying, such as the present study explored. In addressing this gap, the present study did not only further explore the parents' experiences and perspectives of their child's victimization by bullying, but also explored this area using symbolic interactionism theory to gain further insight. Also, application of symbolic interactionism theory helped explain how bullying impacts the family's dynamics (from the victim's perspective) after bullying has occurred. Going back to

parents' awareness of bullying, the next section will discuss an extended view on how parents' involvement and awareness of bullying ties to their understanding of their roles and perceptions of the issue of bullying.

Parents' Involvement and Awareness of Bullying

Holt et al. (2009) examined parents' perspectives on bullying, parent/child concordance about bullying involvement, and the family characteristics associated with bullying perpetration and peer victimization. This study sampled 205 fifth-grade students and their parents. The sample consisted of 54% girls, 43.4% boys, and 2.4% did not identify their gender. Also, there were 31.7% White, 17% Portuguese, 9.3% Hispanic, 5.8% Black, 5.8% Native American, 2.0% Asian, and 27.8% biracial or multiracial. Of parents, 91% were women and 88% were mothers. Fifty-five percent of parents were married, and 31% had a high school diploma, obtained a GED, completed some college, or completed a 2-year associate's degree (39%). Parents reported median family incomes of $35,000–$49,000. The students attended an urban, ethnically diverse school district in the northeast United States. Researchers used self-report measures about general bullying and victimization in the home to collect data from parents and students.

Parents' ratings of bullying perpetration and victimization were lower than the ratings reported by students; and parents' lack of awareness of their children bullying their peers was also reported in smaller numbers (Holt et al., 2009). Having family support was related to students informing their parents about peer victimization and youths being reprimanded at home for bullying perpetration. Victims' homes had fewer rules, higher levels of criticism, and more child maltreatment, whereas bullies' homes were characterized by lack of supervision, child maltreatment, and exposure to domestic

violence. The researchers identified a need to make parents more aware of bullying and to have parents involved with school-based bullying-prevention programs. Such conclusions indicate that the more parents know and are included in programs against bullying, the more favorable school responses will be. Parents could provide ideas about how to improve programs and communication with school officials while also enforcing antibullying behavior or practices in their home environments (Holt et al., 2009). Parent involvement or lack thereof and their home environment could support the present study in understanding how parents' with victimized children experienced bullying and what their perceptions are toward schools and their antibullying programs and policies.

For cyberbullying, parents are considered to be an important source to curtail what is known as a negative and sometimes devastating behavior of a global phenomenon (W. Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson, 2012). In their study, W. Cassidy et al. (2012) suggested parents could become involved in preventing cyberbullying. Their study examined parents' knowledge of social-networking technology, their level of concern about cyberbullying, and promoting cyberkindness, because this type of bullying emanates from home computers. In British Columbia, Canada, 315 parents from three schools completed an open-ended questionnaire. Data analysis indicated parents were unfamiliar with social networking sites such as Facebook, blogs, and chat rooms. Consequently, their lack of familiarity reflected their lack of awareness of the extent of cyberbullying among youth, as well as lack of concern about cyberbullying. However, 83% (n = 261) of parents suggested that to prevent cyberbullying, children's access to technology must be closely monitored; children must have tighter and stricter controls of time on the computer (W. Cassidy et al., 2012).

Parents also believed that adults in the home and school must model good behavior patterns, have open dialogue with youth, and incorporate the theme of cyberbullying in school curricula (W. Cassidy et al., 2012). These results indicated the need for collaboration among students, parents, and educators to counter this behavior (W. Cassidy et al., 2012). This study can lend support to future study on cyberbullying (i.e., texting and instant messaging) and its occurrence in school environments, rather than from the homes of students. The W. Cassidy et al. (2012) study is relevant to the present study in that parents' understanding of their involvement and role as adults could explain how they handle their child's victimization and their own expectations of schools in addressing their child's victimization. However, the present study sought further exploration to gain an in-depth understanding of the internal experiences that parents whose children are victimized by bullying encountered and the meaning associated with their experiences through the lens of symbolic interactionism theory. Further, the present study also extended inquiry to explain how a child's victimization by bullying impacted the child's home (family dynamic) once parents were aware of the incident(s). Next, the literature will explore the perceptions of some prevention programs that were designed to help combat bullying in the schools.

Prevention Programs

Leadbeater and Sukhawathanakul (2011) examined the effectiveness of the Walk Away, Ignore, Talk it out, and Seek Help (WITS) primary program on trajectories of victimization and social responsibility in children from Grades 1 through 3. The WITS program engaged individuals from various sites such as families, schools, and communities to communicate expected behavioral responses to bullying. Using a sample

of 830 students, researchers used a quasiexperimental design to compare schools that had well-established programs to schools without programs, using data collected over an 18-month period (Leadbeater & Sukhawathanakul, 2011).

The findings from this study showed 422 children in the WITS program demonstrated rapid declines in peer victimization over time when compared to their counterparts of 418 children in schools lacking programs (Leadbeater & Sukhawathanakul, 2011). Based on this finding, the study can support future studies on intervention programs and their positive outcomes for antibullying school programs. Furthermore, it is likely that having the participation of families, schools, and communities in the WITS program may have brought greater awareness and education about peer victimization, possibly leading to lower victimization rates. It is also likely that such engagement allowed schools to effectively address the issue of bullying when implementing their programs. Leadbeater and Sukhawathanakul (2011) suggested that schools' response to bullying is effective with the involvement of others, especially parents.

O'Moore and Minton (2005) reviewed a nationwide program implemented in Norway in 1996, designed to prevent and manage bullying in Irish schools. In their study, 11 teachers were trained in a 12-day training through workshops and seminars to subsequently train and support boards of management, staff, pupils, and parents in countering bullying in their school communities. Researchers gave questionnaires to teachers before and after the implementation of the antibullying training program, asking about their knowledge and feelings about bullying. O'Moore and Minton asked students to complete a preprogram and postprogram evaluation of the modified Olweus

Bully/Victim Questionnaire to determine the effectiveness of the program. Parents who participated in the project obtained information from a leaflet on the prevalence, types, causes, effects, and indicators of bullying among peers, along with information on how to best address allegations or actual incidents of bullying (O'Moore & Minton, 2005).

The results showed significance in the reduction of pupils who reported having been victimized after the implementation of the program (O'Moore & Minton, 2005), with 19.6% fewer reports of pupil victimization overall. Furthermore, researchers identified a reduction of 50.0% of pupil victimization in the last school term, and 43.0% reduction of victimization in the last 5 school days (during the time of the study). They recorded a reduction of 17.3% in pupils who took part in bullying after implementation of the program. A major impact of the program was reflected in the reduction of 69.2% in pupils frequently bullying others in the last school term and 51.8% in pupil who taken part in bullying others in the last 5 school days. Although the program proved to be effective, according to the authors, the challenge of the study lay in attempting to increase the number of pupils reporting bullying incidents to teachers and parents (O'Moore & Minton, 2005). Parents and teachers in particular might be unaware of a bullying incident when students are not forthcoming. Hence parents and schools' responses to bullying might be delayed or unattended when there is no knowledge that bullying occurred.

E. Brown, Low, Smith, and Haggerty's (2011) study used a similar approach to that of Leadbeater and Sukhawathanakul (2011), to examine the effectiveness of the Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Program (SRT). The study employed an experimental design of 33 elementary schools in California to intervention or waitlisted control conditions and used multilevel analyses that accounted for student, classroom,

and school-level effects. Researchers obtained data from all school staff, randomly selected third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade teachers in each school, and all students in the classrooms of the selected teachers. Like Leadbeater and Sukhawathanakul, E. Brown et al. (2011) concluded that SRT produced positive outcomes such as improvement in student climate, lower levels of physical bullying perpetration, and lower bullying-related problems in school. This study suggested that schools can lower their chances of bullying when prevention programs are in place and are implemented, which may improve school perceptions by parents.

In a study by Cross et al. (2011), the researchers conducted a randomized controlled trial that researched 29 schools to determine the efficacy of the Friendly Schools whole-of-school program. The study was conducted over 3 years with a sample of 1,968 eight- to nine-year-old children. The intervention program targeted the entire school, classroom, family, and individual students with the intention of bullying reduction. Surveys that provided self-reported data on the frequency of bullying and victimization yielded findings that indicated students who took part in the intervention group were significantly less likely to observe bullying during the 12, 24, and 36 months, more likely to be victimized after 12 and 36 months; and were more likely to report being victimized after 12 months than counterpart student. There were no differences in self-reported acts of bullying peers (Cross et al., 2011). Just as with studies by E. Brown et al. (2011) with the SRT program, and Leadbeater and Sukhawathanakul's (2011) review of the WITS program, the findings revealed that schoolwide programs helped reduce experiences of being victimized. One factor of the findings is that reports of victimization reinforced the notion that intervention programs empower all students. Again, this study

suggested that schools' response to bullying may be through implementation of their programs.

Paradoxically, Jeong and Lee's (2013) findings of their twofold study on the relationship between school environment and peer victimization, and previous models of preventive strategies, run counter to the common perception found in studies by E. Brown et al. (2011) and Leadbeater and Sukhawathanakul's (2011). Jeong and Lee's findings revealed that schools that have implemented bullying-prevention programs are likely to have peer victimization when compared to schools without bullying-prevention programs. According to the authors of this study, it is possible that when bullies are familiar with antibullying programs, they may choose to ignore them. In other words, those identified as bullies have recognized what it takes to ameliorate the problem, so they create alternative methods to victimize their peers. The researchers reached this conclusion with the understanding that bullies establish and maintain their dominant social status among peers, especially when in school (Jeong & Lee, 2013; Thornberg, 2010; Young et al., 2006). This finding not only begs the question of why schools respond to bullying in the way they do, but it is also supportive of the present study's main research question to better understand, "How do parents whose children experienced school bullying perceive school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family's dynamics?" With further exploration to understand this phenomenon, the present study applied symbolic interactionism theory to learn of any other aspects that may help bring further insight from parents' experiences and perspectives of their child's victimization by bullying. Further inquiry provided an explanation of victimization by bullying and how the victims' family dynamic was

impacted or viewed by their parents. In short, the reviewed study suggested that future actions focus on bullying-prevention programs that focus on systemic change in schools (Jeong & Lee, 2013). A focus on systemic change in schools suggests schools are making efforts to address the issue of bullying in other ways rather than through only one avenue. Hence, the next section will consider reviewing the use of peer mediation programs in schools as one other way to address bullying.

Peer Mediation and Bullying

Schellenberg, Parks-Savage, and Rehfuss (2007) conducted a study that evaluated the effectiveness of an existing peer-mediation program known as Peace Pal in a diverse, suburban elementary school in the middle Atlantic region of the United States. The participants in this study were 825 students who took part in the peer-mediation program. Subpopulations were 62% African American, 33% Caucasians, and 5% "Other." The researchers' goal was to answer the following research questions:

> Do peer mediation sessions result in the successful resolution of student conflict? Does student knowledge pertaining to conflict, conflict resolution, and mediation increase as a result of Peace Pal training? Do the number of school-wide out-of-school suspensions decrease with the implementation of the Peace Pal program? Do disputing students who participate in peer mediation sessions view the sessions as valuable? Do peer mediators perceive the Peace Pal program as valuable? (Schellenberg et al., 2007, p. 476)

According to research findings, the Peace Pal program was effective and met the intended goal and objectives of the program (Schellenberg et al., 2007). Given the results, this study may aid future studies in understanding why some students find it most

effective to communicate with peers about bullying, rather than teachers and parents, as suggested in Athanasiades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis's (2010) study mentioned above. As recommended by Schellenberg et al. (2007), future studies may consider parents' and school personnel perceptions of the program's strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for enhancement. Involving parents, in particular, may guide them through the process of having a victimized child and bring understanding of how they perceived the process.

In a study where Fenning et al. (2012) discussed findings of a content analysis of 120 high school-level written discipline policies from six states, suspension and expulsions were the common discipline responses of schools, including minor behaviors where suspensions and expulsions were applied to those who were late or truant. Schools rated bullying behavior as a "moderate" behavior, which, in turn, led to suspension or expulsion as a result of a "reactive consequence" (ranging from minor to severe behaviors) by schools. "Proactive consequences" were considered to be parent or teacher conference, peer mediation, or substance-abuse counseling. In their analysis, discipline policies varied by state, giving different views to students and parents on what behaviors meet the criteria for suspension or expulsion (Fenning et al., 2012).

Study findings suggested that most policies across all states focus on punitive means that involve suspension and expulsion, with the exclusion of offering proactive alternatives that involve teaching expected behaviors (Fenning et al., 2012). Researchers recommended alternatives to suspension to provide resources to schools as a shift toward more prevention-oriented models and proactive alternatives of approaching discipline in policy and practice (Fenning et al., 2012). Findings from the Schellenberg et al. (2007) study revealed significant reductions in the school's out-of-school suspensions after

implementation of the Peace Pal program; that program is an effective example that proactive consequences such as peer mediation may offer recommendations for refined discipline policies for schools. Also, considering peer mediation as a form of proactive consequences could require the support of parents in the development of schools' disciplinary policies and practices. Having parents involved in the development of disciplinary policies may address their perceptions of steps schools take to address bullying.

Ayers, Wagaman, Geiger, Bermudez-Parsai, and Hedberg (2012) found that their first hypothesis—that disciplinary strategies such as detention, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and spending time in the office will likely be ineffective to deter the recurrence of bullying and aggressive behaviors—was supported by their study. Their study examined disciplinary strategies used among school officials and teachers to determine which is likely to deter the recurrence of bullying and aggressive behaviors among school-aged students from kindergarten through 12th grade. The researchers also employed the social-ecological framework to understand the effectiveness of the different types of disciplinary strategies (i.e., impacting the individual student, inhibiting school privileges, or incorporating parents; Ayers et al., 2012).

Ayers et al. (2012) determined that disciplinary strategies that inhibit or reduce privileged interactions with peers outside the classroom (loss of privilege) was effective, in that it deterred the recurrence of bullying and aggressive behaviors, which supported their second hypothesis. Their final conclusion also supported their third hypothesis, which stated that disciplinary strategies that involved the parents, teachers, or

administrators being in contact with parents and conducting parent–teacher conference would be effective in deterring the recurrence of bullying and aggressive behaviors.

Future studies may delve further in understanding why disciplinary strategies that required removing a student from the structured setting of a school environment (i.e., out-of-school suspension) was ineffective in deterring the recurrence of bullying and aggressive behaviors. First, Fenning et al. (2012) reiterated the American Psychological Association Task Force on Zero Tolerance (2008) conclusion that suspension is ineffective, as it is taking valuable instructional time from the student. Furthermore, Skiba et al. (2011) and Wald and Losen (as cited in Fenning et al., 2012) posited that suspension is associated with greater societal problems like school dropout and entry to the juvenile justice system (Losen & Skiba, as cited in Fenning et al., 2012). In sum, applying suspension is the least effective approach in addressing school bullying or other school conflicts. This notion suggests that parents whose children experienced school bullying may perceive schools' environment and effectiveness or ineffectiveness based on the disciplinary approaches school administrators and teachers have designed or assigned to their schools.

Gibson and Haight's (2013) study supported the notion that out-of-school suspension, especially, is ineffective in solving school conflicts among peers. Gibson and Haight conducted a qualitative study to examine the culturally nuanced meanings of out-of-school suspensions for 30 lower income caregivers of African American children who were suspended from school in the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota metropolitan area between September 2009 and May 2012. School administrators applied out-of-school suspensions when students were engaged in nonviolent behaviors like insubordination

and defiance during classroom instruction, and also when involved in physical altercations with peers. Being bullied by their peers was the common cause for fights among peers. Caregivers generally valued children's success in school, recognized when their children had misbehaved, and supported teachers' and officials' imposition of appropriate consequences, though out-of-school suspensions were viewed as inappropriate consequences.

Gibson and Haight (2013) asked caregivers to describe their experiences of their children's suspensions in in-depth, individual, audiotaped interviews. Results from this study depicted the negative connotation that out-of-school suspensions leave on caregivers. Some caregivers described the bullying laws as "really soft," and not keeping their children safe (p. 268). Hence, they taught their children how to physically and emotionally keep themselves safe or defend themselves from bullies. In researchers' opinion, caregivers perceived educators as failing to respect home rules they instilled in their children, in part, in their interpretations of suspensions as racially motivated. Such interpretation led caregivers to believe that suspensions were characterized as unjust, harmful to children, negligent in helping children with underlying problems such as bullying, undermining parents' racial socialization, and, in general, racially problematic. This belief led some caregivers to withdraw from participation in their schools. In this situation, peer mediation could be considered an alternative to suspensions, so family–school relationships can be preserved and promote a working relationship to better address the issues (Ayers et al., 2012).

The Gibson and Haight (2013) study suggested that understanding how caregivers experienced their child's suspensions can provide important clues as to how families and

schools can work together to effectively reduce racial disparities in out-of-school suspensions, especially when 90% of children attending the school are of color (racial minority), but the staff is 100% White, as was the case for this study (Gibson & Haight, 2013). This study developed the notion that parents' perception of schools' responses to bullying could differ from what their expectations are of the schools' protocols.

Contradicting findings from the Schellenberg et al. (2007) study on peer mediation, Gibson and Haight (2013) did not imply that peer mediation is effective under all conditions. For example, Sellman's (2011) study on nine schools (seven primary and two secondary) in England looked at the use of peer mediation from pre- to postintervention. The conceptual framework that guided the study was the activity theory, so that better understanding and describing the transformational processes in schools could be explained. Activity theory also lends understanding to the relationship between cultural and interactional levels of analysis in schools (Sellman, 2011).

The findings from the study showed that peer mediation was effective where there was a considerable shift in the division of labor, accompanied by the innovation of new cultural tools that encouraged new ways of thinking (i.e., incorporating new rules) and handling conflict (Sellman, 2011). However, schools that did not demonstrate this change in their environment did not have effective peer-mediation outcomes. In fact, Sellman asserted,

> Broadwood (2000) states that successful peer mediation service has to be compatible with a school's vision and its approach to regulating social relations. This is characterized by clear and consistent means for dealing with conflict, which are modeled by all teachers and reproduced in their management style.

> Schools that implement initiatives as if they can be 'bolted upon' existing structures, determined by adults, are likely to both sustain the initiative and reap any benefits without radical appraisal and transformation of the structure of relevant activities in school (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; Wyness, 2006). (p. 58)

Traditional activity like teacher arbitration, was characterized by strong "classification and framing" that placed the power and control of enforcing rules on teachers (Sellman, 2011, p. 53). Having peer mediation was characterized by weak "classification" and strong "framing," whereas negotiation was characterized by weak "classification and framing" (Sellman, 2011, p. 53). Schools that underpinned the traditional activity of principles of power and control have to be transformed for new models such as peer mediation to be implemented. Rather than interpreting peer mediation as an ineffective tool, Sellman (2003) suggested that this was a psychological issue that concerned teachers' perception of authority and not the practical issue regarding resources (as cited in Sellman, 2011). More study on peer mediation in schools should be considered in future studies to promote student empowerment and school culture. Studies on peer mediation could aid researchers in understanding if such programs in schools are perceived as effective by parents whose children experienced bullying in certain school districts.

Although peer mediation might be found to be effective with some, others do not benefit from the program. Ttofi and Farrington (2011) conducted a study on the effectiveness of school-based antibullying programs by comparing those who received the program with a control group that did not. Although school-based programs were

effective in this study, particular elements (with more intensive programs including parent meetings, firm disciplinary methods, and improved playground supervision) were associated with a decrease in bullying and victimization. However, one program element that included working with peers (i.e., peer mediation, peer monitoring, and encouragement of bystander intervention) yielded a significant increase in victimization. The study suggested that future evaluations of antibullying programs should be designed in spite of the findings here. Also, researchers should consider the way the program was implemented; perhaps such study will lend greater understanding to the ineffectiveness of peer mediation. The results from this study indicated that such ineffectiveness of the school-based antibullying program may leave parents of a victimized child feeling disheartened about their situation.

Another perspective on peer mediation and school conflicts was supported in the study by Turnuklu et al. (2010). They tested the effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer mediation (CRPM) training among 10- and 11-year-old elementary school students in Turkey. The program was designed to suit the Turkish cultural and educational setting, using a pretest–posttest quasiexperimental design. The sample consisted of 591 students, of whom 326 (165 girls and 161 boys) participated in the experiment and the remaining 265 students (125 girls and 140 boys) comprised the control group. The experimental group consisted of 168 fourth-grade and 158 fifth-grade students, whereas the control group consisted of 124 fourth-grade and 141 fifth-grade students. For researchers to obtain information on how students used conflict-resolution strategies, they asked students to complete a self-report questionnaire that included four subscales:

integrative/constructive, smoothing, forcing, and *withdrawing/avoidance strategies* (Turnuklu et al., 2010).

The results showed that the CRPM training increased the integrative/constructive strategy (striving to arrive at an agreement that's conducive for both parties) for the whole group for boys, but not for girls (Turnuklu et al., 2010). A similar result was reported in the forcing strategy (achieving one's goal without regard for the relationship). The whole group of boys demonstrated a decrease whereas girls displayed no change. Students showed a decrease in withdrawing/avoidance strategy (giving up the goal and relationship) for the whole group, with no observable change for boys and girls. The smoothing strategy (maintaining the relationship without regard for one's goal) showed no change in any of the groups. However, only the pretest and posttest of the experimental group had a significant result when compared separately for the whole group for boys only, and only girls. Overall, the study suggested that the CRPM training was ineffective in girls, and that a culturally relevant CRPM training program at the elementary level is necessary to establish a more peaceful school environment (Turnuklu et al., 2010). This study suggests that schools' approaches to solve peer conflicts may not always be appropriate in every culture or school. When programs like the CRPM are proven to be ineffective, parents could be left feeling hopeless and frustrated in seeking help regarding their child's victimization.

Mcloughlin's (2010) study on service-learning interventions among behaviorally challenging youth supported peer mediation and its effectiveness. Mcloughlin's aim was to implement service-learning interventions to increase students' bonding to their school community, increase personal responsibility, develop an ability to manage conflict

responsibly, identify with positive peers, and increase prosocial skill repertoires. The sample consisted of 26 adolescent students who attended an alternative high school in the United States, due to their failure in regular school settings. Students were paired to work together in small heterogeneous groups with the goal of improving their school or solving a problem they recognized in their school. This study found that pre- and postintervention tests yielded improvement in behavioral accountability, bonding to school, anger management, and the establishment of a psychological sense of school membership. In this case, service-learning intervention is a tool determined to be effective in increasing affiliation with the life of the school and enhancement of valuing oneself in a group of behaviorally challenging youth (Mcloughlin, 2010).

The outcome from the Mcloughlin (2010) study may suggest that peer-mediated service-learning interventions such as the one Mcloughlin employed can support Sellman's (2011) notion that school cultures that substantiate student empowerment are likely to succeed through peer-mediation interventions. For the current study, parents' perceptions of their victimized child's school administrators, teachers, antibullying policies and programs may very well be depended on the success of programs already in place.

The aforementioned studies are all clear indication that to some degree, peer-mediation programs in schools are effective. Results from the studies also suggested that having an intervention plan might be better than not having one in place at all. Therefore, it is worthy that the present study continue the exploration to understand how parents of victimized children of bullying perceive schools' antibullying policies or programs in their respective school districts. Furthermore, with an elaborated view, the present study

extended this notion by incorporating symbolic interactionism theory, and explains how these parents' perceived their family's dynamics, as well as the impact the incidents had on their families, after learning of their children's victimization by bullying. This next section of the literature will acknowledge and understand how parenting styles and the culture of parents may impact a child's role as a perpetrator or victim of bullying.

Parenting Styles, Culture, and Bullying

Georgiou (2008a) shed light on parenting style and bullying. Specifically, Georgiou conducted a study to propose and test a theory-driven model (i.e., responsiveness, demandingness, bullying and victimization experiences, maternal overprotection, and anxiety) that could describe the effects that existed between parental style and child involvement in bullying among peers at school. The researcher's goal was to clarify some confusion that existed in the relevant literature about the link between maternal responsiveness, overprotection, and anxiety, to child victimization; and to examine the possible differences in bullying and victimization experiences of children who grew up experiencing various parental styles. Therefore, the researcher's hypotheses were (a) maternal responsiveness will influence child victimization at school, indirectly through parental overprotection, (b) maternal responsiveness will negatively influence a child to bully at school, (c) maternal demandingness will negatively influence exhibition of bullying and victimization tendencies in school, and (d) authoritative parenting styles will influence children to have higher academic achievement and lower their likelihood of bullying others and becoming victims of bullying.

Georgiou (2008a) collected data from 377 Greek Cypriot children who attended sixth-grade elementary school, along with their parents—specifically, mothers. From the

10 selected schools, Georgiou studied 183 female students. Four schools were in urban districts whereas six were in rural areas. The researcher selected participants randomly, using a list of public elementary schools in an educational district in Cyprus. Based on the sample representation, 15% of participants were from low socioeconomic status (SES-below the federal poverty line) with no high school diploma obtained from either parent; 25% of participants came from high SES family backgrounds—with the main income provider a university graduate who held a professional job. The remaining 60% of study participants represented an average SES level in the study (Georgiou, 2008a).

Findings from this study revealed an association between parental/maternal responsiveness, overprotection, or permissive mothers, and child victimization and low indications of carrying out bullying behaviors (Georgiou, 2008a). However, in contrast, parental styles that were perceived as authoritarian were connected to peer bullying, and children of authoritative parents performed better academically and socially due to possible factors associated with authoritative parents: providing limitations/boundaries and responsiveness to their children while also respecting their independence. Hence, authoritative parents may teach their child to have confidence, which is then perceived as strength by their peers. In general, the tested model showed that parental practices played a role in child bullying and victimization in schools; the hypotheses of the study were fully supported (Georgiou, 2008a).

The study suggested that maternal demandingness or responsiveness taught children to be less powerful or weak, especially in social settings, resulting in victimization (Georgiou, 2008a). Children, taught to be friendly and obedient may become targeted as bully victims, due to their passive or submissive demeanor, seen by

their peers (Georgiou, 2008a). These kinds of parental interaction may bring forth understanding of how parents approach schools, once they have learned of their child's victimization.

Because results did not speak to whether parental styles are linked to SES or location (i.e., rural or urban), further studies should consider exploring SES and its effects on parental styles and child bullying and victimization. It may be possible that parents of low SES may focus more on their financial obligations/strains than their parental involvement with their child, whereas parents with high SES (above the federal poverty line) are less consumed with meeting their financial obligations, or less worried about being able to afford their financial obligations, and, therefore, may spend more time in nurturing or being responsive toward their children.

In a similar study, again, by Georgiou (2008b), the researcher studied 252 Greek Cypriot children in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades of elementary school and their mothers. This study embellished the previous study, looking at maternal depressiveness. Like the previous study, the aim was to examine maternal characteristics and their relationship to child victimization and bullying. Here, Georgiou applied four scales: two were completed by the child participants whereas the other two were completed by their mothers (i.e., Revised Bullying and Victimization Questionnaire, Miller, Dilorio, and Dudley's questionnaire for parenting style, the Parental Involvement Scale, and the Major Depression Inventory). Additionally, all participants were required to complete a demographics form asking about the child's school achievement, social adjustment, and behavior while at school (Georgiou, 2008b).

The study revealed that not only was maternal responsiveness positively associated with the child's adjustment at school (i.e., achievement and social adoption), it also negatively related to the child's aggression (i.e., bullying and disrupting behaviors) at school (Georgiou, 2008b). The responsive behaviors of mothers in this study demonstrated warmth, empathy, kindness, and compassion to their child, which were emulated in their peer relations, as security and high self-esteem were generated. However, when maternal responsiveness was translated/interpreted as overprotection, the child was perceived to be at risk for victimization (Georgiou, 2008b). Furthermore, Georgiou (2008b) found alignment with the previous study in that anxious and extremely protective mothers' children were passive and submissive and unable to control and handle their own affairs. Again, this could be because children are unable to think for themselves because their responsive mothers are always readily available to listen and solve their problems (Georgiou, 2008b).

Although the Georgiou (2008b) study did not specifically articulate the relationship between maternal responsiveness and children's aggressive behaviors, as the researcher stated, results determined a possible explanation: perhaps maternal responsiveness may leave a child feeling compelled to not be seen as submissive or passive by their peers, but rather as a bully or aggressor, to prevent being bullied. Further study may help clarify this notion.

Other findings from the study showed that maternal depression was aligned with aggressive children (Georgiou, 2008b). Children whose mothers suffer from depression or unstable moods may face harsh or irrational punishment, due to their mother's temperament (Georgiou, 2008b). Because depressed mothers may not be emotionally

stable enough to care for their child, children may become aggressive from the lack of attention and support they are missing from their depressed mother. Also, irrational punishments that may be a result of the mother's mood, which may drive the child to mistreat peers, projecting anger and frustration. This study suggested that parental involvement is imperative to designing antibullying intervention plans (Georgiou, 2008b). Also, the results from this study suggested that parents' experiences and approaches to addressing school bullying are contingent on their present state of mind. Depending on their emotional state of mind, their way of approaching their child's victimization situation may change with the situation or timing of an incident.

Williams and Kennedy (2012) conducted a study to determine whether there were links among attachment styles, bullying, and victimization, with consideration of the types of aggression (e.g., physical and relational). According to their study, there was indirect evidence that suggested that there might be a linkage. Also, Jeynes (2008) and Malone et al. (as cited in Williams and Kennedy, 2012) posited that children with low family involvement and high family conflict have been associated with victimization. Therefore, Williams and Kennedy hypothesized that those who were secure or insecure-ambivalent in attachment to their mother would exhibit lower levels of bullying when compared to insecure-avoidant individuals; and children who were insecure-ambivalent in attachment to mother were likely to exhibit higher levels of victimization when compared to secure or insecure-avoidant individuals. The researchers supported *attachment theory,* which stated that infants begin to form an attachment with their primary caregiver, and security or insecurity of this attachment is contingent on the quality of early interactions with the individuals' caregiver. They found that girls were

more likely to engage in physical aggression when measures of attachment avoidance to their mother was scored at a higher level and when attachment anxiety with their fathers was exhibited at higher scores as well. Also, girls were more likely to engage in relational aggression when their scores were higher on the measure of attachment anxiety to their mothers whereas boys were likely to demonstrate this type of aggression when measures were higher on attachment anxiety to their fathers. Furthermore, girls who scored higher on measures of anxiety in their relationship with their mothers showed a relation to victimization of peer aggression during childhood (Williams & Kennedy, 2012).

Williams and Kennedy's findings supported Georgiou (2008a), in that children with less affectionate (authoritarian) and supportive mothers are likely to experience being bullied/victimized; and supportive (authoritative/permissive) mothers are likely to report incidents of victimization. Children with higher levels of attachment anxiety to their mothers are more likely to be victimized because victimization is associated with maternal overprotection (Georgiou, 2008a; Williams & Kennedy, 2012). Also, Williams and Kennedy suggested that children with less affection and support from their father are likely to show aggressive behaviors to others. One can conclude that the child–parent interaction is important in understanding parental role in bullying or victimization. The child–parent relationship could also explain parents' feelings and approach to their child's victimization from bullying.

In addition, Ahmed and Braithwaite (2004) examined the roles of family, studying parenting-style variables (authoritarian and authoritative parenting, and family disharmony), and school variables (liking school, perceived control of bullying, and school hassles) in discriminating children who were self-identified and parent-identified

bullies, victims and those who were not bullied. Participants consisted of 1,401 students from Grades 4 to 7. Students in the study attended 32 public and private schools in the Australian Capital Territory. Findings from this study provided a similar result to that in Georgiou's (2008a) study: students who were identified as bullies and bully/victims were distinguished by their home environments, with parents who applied an authoritarian parenting style (harsh and punitive). Furthermore, students who were considered victims and bully/victims also experienced family disharmony, with bullies scoring higher than unbullied students (poor social and interpersonal skills demonstrated in family, based on the child's perception).

However, Ahmed and Braithwaite (2004) did not offer any significant differences in authoritative parenting style (parents who show warmth/affection and praised their child) and those who were not bullied. Results of school variables showed that unbullied students scored higher than victims, bullies, and bully/victims in school liking and perceived control of bullying; and both bullies and victims scored as highly as victims on experiencing school hassles, although bullies did not score more highly than unbullied students. The study suggested that family experiences shaped students' capacity to adapt and cope in school environments; problems at home would likely be reflected at school (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004). As the study concluded, family and school systems must be integrated to sufficiently impact bullying. Therefore, school administrators need to take heed of parents' concerns about bullying, as understanding family variables may allow better approaches to eliminating bullying, and not only by school policies and antibullying programs. In other words, working with parents may suggest and encourage teaching positive parental skills/characteristics. Most importantly, schools that consider

family dynamics may develop different strategies to address parents' concerns regarding their victimized child.

Curtner-Smith et al. (2006) offered a different perspective of parenting style and bullying. In their study, 44 mothers and their 4-year old children in a local Head Start program (low-income families in the southern region of the United States) were participants in the study. The majority of children and their mothers (95.5%) were African American, and 4.5% were White. The researchers asked teachers to complete an assessment of students, relational bullying, and covert bullying. Curtner-Smith et al. found that a small percentage of students rated by teachers were engaged in relational bullying "frequently to almost always," while slightly half of students were rated by their teachers as those who engaged in relational bullying "occasionally to about half of the time" (pp. 187–188). Researchers found similar results in the frequency with which students were engaged in overt physical bullying. Moreover, there was a strong correlation between parenting, maternal empathy, students' relational bullying, and overt bullying, particularly in mothers who had low empathy for their children. Mothers' with inappropriate developmental expectations for their children and mothers who needed to exert power rather than encourage independence for their children related to their children's relational bullying. Regarding mothers' parenting, this study suggested that maternal empathy and emotional sensitivity might help lower children's aggression. This study might support further research to determine parents' feelings and approach to addressing their victimized child when looking at their level of emotional sensitivity.

Based on the demographics (population and poverty-stricken area) of this study, mothers whose children were victimized by children engaged in relational and overt

bullying may experience lack of support from the school in seeking help for their children's victimization, as schools in this area and of this population may lack the resources to promote and implement antibullying programs. Although speculative, it could be that schools may have good intentions to work with parents and their children's victimizations, but are unable to do so.

Windle et al. (2010) evaluated the invariance of predictive relations on 650 fifth-grade children and on one of their primary caregivers of Hispanic, non-Hispanic White, and non-Hispanic Black ethnic background regarding parenting factors and "externalizing" (e.g., aggressive behaviors, problem behaviors, and delinquency/fighting) and "internalizing" (e.g., negative affect, loneliness, and fear of negative evaluation) problems and victimization of bullying. The researchers' primary focus was to study the dimensions of parenting factors (i.e., parental monitoring, nurturance, and normative expectation/parental norms) and how they influenced early adolescents' problem behaviors for children living in Birmingham, Alabama; Los Angeles County, California; and Houston, Texas (Windle et al., 2010). The sample consisted of 236 non-Hispanic Blacks, 205 Hispanics, 157 non-Hispanic Whites, and 52 non-Hispanic others. With regard to sex, 311 were identified as boys whereas 349 were girls. Windle et al. hypothesized that (a) higher parental monitoring would significantly predict lower levels of externalizing problems, (b) higher parental norms (expectations) would predict lower levels of externalizing problems, and (c) lower maternal nurturance would significantly predict higher levels of internalizing problems.

The Windle et al. (2010) study found that all three hypotheses were supported whereby parental rules or having knowledge of their child's whereabouts and

involvement related to the child's lower levels of early adolescent problem behaviors; they found parental norms to be significantly associated with the child's lower levels of externalizing problems across sex and ethnicity. When parental expectations are conveyed to the child, they are internalized and reduce levels of problem behaviors; maternal nurturance was a significant predictor of internalizing problems through the interaction of parental monitoring. Furthermore, the authors found that victimization of bullying was highly similar for sex and across ethnic groups. The study results suggested that parent-based theories and intervention programs developed with predominantly White samples might have applicability to non-White samples in general (Windle et al., 2010).

Generally, the Windle et al. (2010) study may also suggest that parental involvement, warmth, and consistent communication with one's child could reduce the likelihood of the child being involved in bullying or being victimized by bullying, as was found in the review of the Curtner-Smith et al. (2006) study. Parents who understand that their parenting style can predict their child's social interaction and outcomes, especially in school settings, may bring additional support/perspectives to having effective intervention programs. This could lend support to school protocols or policies in how to respond to parents' concerns of school bullying.

Similarly, Burkhart, Knox, and Brockmyer (2013) conducted a study that examined the relationship among parent characteristics (i.e., hostility, depression, and overall parenting skills) and child bullying. They also looked at the effects of the American Psychological Association's Adults and Children Together Raising Safe Kids program (ACT-RSK) on reducing early childhood bullying. Burkhart et al. gathered data

from 52 parents/caregivers who represented children aged 4 to 10 years. Of the 52 adults, 25 were trained in the ACT-RSK program for effective parenting that included nonviolent discipline, child development, anger management, social problem-solving skills, effects of violent media on children, and methods to protect children from being exposed to violence (Burkhart et al., 2013).

The results from the Burkhart et al. (2013) study showed that parents who exhibited hostility (i.e., feeling easily annoyed; experiencing temper outbursts; having urges to beat, injure, or harm someone; having urges to break or smash objects; and engaging in frequent arguments) was the only predictor of child bullying, in contrast to Georgiou's (2008b) study, which concluded that maternal depression was related to aggressive children. It is possible that children's bullying behaviors and exposure to parental hostility are an act of familiarity. In other words, children may react to others in ways that are familiar to them. Additionally, the study revealed that children whose parents/caregivers participated in the ACT-RSK program showed a decrease in bullying. This result aligns with the suggestion made in the previous review that parents' understanding of their parental practices can lead to effective intervention programs. In this case, parents' understanding of skills they were taught was effective in amending their child's social interaction with others. Therefore, the study results suggested that parents' involvement in bullying prevention is important; and, in turn, such involvement can decrease the school's overall bullying rate among peers. When parents and schools are able to work together, schools' response to bullying could be efficiently implemented, and could lessen or discourage bullying behaviors in schools.

In contrast to other studies (e.g., Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Curtner-Smith et al., 2006; Georgiou, 2008a, 2008b; Windle et al., 2010), Hokoda, Lu, and Angeles (2006) found that for school bullying in Taiwanese adolescents, with the relationship of school bullying to parents' authoritarian, authoritative, and overprotective parenting practices, there were no relationships between parents who practiced authoritarian parenting styles and children's victimization and bullying of peers. That is, parents who demonstrated verbal hostility, corporal punishment, and directedness were not linked to children's bullying behaviors, unlike in the findings discussed earlier. Also, authoritative parenting styles had no relationship to children's experiences of direct and indirect victimization of bullying. However, authoritative parenting was positively related to recipients of prosocial behaviors from their peers, which aligns with Georgiou's (2008a, 2000b) findings that authoritative parenting is related to the child's positive social and academic outcomes, as parents are characterized by warmth and responsiveness (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Hokoda et al., 2006).

Lastly, no relationship surfaced between overprotective parenting styles and direct or indirect victimization of bullying; but, again, this parenting approach was positively related with students' receipt of prosocial behaviors from peers (Hokoda et al., 2006). This study's outcome suggested that school bullying is common and prevalent among Taiwanese adolescents, and is not reserved for Western societies. More research may help in understanding the differences between results of authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles in Taiwan. In other words, understanding how culture might influence school bullying and victimization of bullying is important for further study. Such results may reveal that parents of Asian descent and especially of authoritative and

overprotective parenting styles may not show higher incidents of child's victimization in school, as children are likely to be recipients of prosocial behaviors, and therefore may not recognize bullying.

Hesketh et al. (2011) performed a study on behavioral problems among Chinese children. Their study aimed to determine levels of behavior problem in primary school children, and to explore key determinants that were of relevance to the Chinese context (i.e., being an only child, urban living, school stressors, being bullied, and physical punishment). The study was carried out in urban and rural locations in Zhejiang Province. The urban location was Hangzhou, a booming city with rapid changes, whereas the rural location was a poor county in western Zhejiang. Hesketh et al. gave children (aged 7–13) from nine primary schools a self-completion questionnaire, whereas their parents were provided with the Rutter Parent Scale.

Rutter scores indicated that 13.2% of the children exhibited behavior problems. No association was found with being the only child and having behavior problems (Hesketh et al., 2011). Researchers found a statistically significant increase in girls with emotional problems than with boys (5.3% vs. 2.3%), and emotional problems were mostly related with being bullied. Scores about school stressors showed that 78% worry "a lot" about examinations, 80% felt pressured to perform at a high level in school "all the time," and 44% bullied their peers at least "sometimes" (p. 733). The study also revealed that 71% of children were sometimes or often physically punished by their parents, and this is related to the fact that in Asian cultures, "parents strongly believe that their children's behavior is a reflection of their ability to provide proper guidance" (Hokoda et al., 2006, p. 82). Furthermore, Chinese parents are quite likely to use physical

punishment on their children, especially if they have behaved badly (Hesketh et al., 2011). Lastly, researchers identified a strong association with conduct problems with boys who had been bullied, living in a rural location, who frequently experienced physical punishment by their parents. The study suggested that there were high levels of behavior problems in the Chinese children who participated in the study, raising serious concerns for their future mental well-being (Hesketh et al., 2011).

Given the results of this study and the relevance of this section, one may conclude that authoritarian parental discipline styles such as the kind described in the Hesketh et al. (2011) study are associated with behavior problems, as determined in other studies (e.g., Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Curtner-Smith et al., 2006; Georgiou, 2008a, 2008b; Shetgiri, Lin, Avila, & Flores, 2012). Chinese parents who learned their child had carried out bullying behaviors may seek answers from the school, to put an end to their child's "bad behavior." Also, Chinese parents may seek and anticipate a positive outcome after speaking with teachers and school administrators about their child's poor behavior, so they will not appear to lack "proper guidance." This possibility, in turn, supports the notion of parental involvement in bullying intervention initiatives in schools (i.e., Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Cooper & Nickerson, 2013; Georgiou, 2008b).

Shetgiri et al. (2012) conducted a study to identify factors that may be associated with child bullying in the United States. They analyzed data from the 2007 National Survey of Children's Health. By using this survey, researchers could examine the associations among child, parent, and community factors with bullying behaviors among children aged 10 to 17. The results indicated that African American and Latino children and children living in poverty who had emotional, developmental, or behavioral problems

were likely to bully. Also, children were more likely to portray bullying behaviors when their parents felt angry with them; suboptimal maternal mental health was associated with children's higher levels of bullying; educational attainment in the household, family income, family structure (i.e., 1-parent household); and living in unsafe neighborhoods and schools. In contrast, children whose parents communicated with them, helped complete their homework regularly, and met with all or most of their friends were less likely to demonstrate bullying behaviors among their peers. This outcome aligns with Curtner-Smith's et al. (2006) assertion that children who are at risk of bullying live in poor environments, lack cognitive stimulation at home, have parents with little education, experience high level of parental stress and depression and harsh parental discipline (i.e., authoritarian parenting style), undergo increased family conflict (i.e., family disharmony), and are exposed to crime or violence in the neighborhood where the child resides.

Also, the assertion by Curtner-Smith et al. (2006) lends support to Georgiou's (2008b) findings on bullying and maternal depression. In this case, mothers who exhibited anger toward their children (their children bothered them a lot, or their children were hard to care for) may seek help from the school once they learn of their child bullying peers. Seeking help and expecting a positive result may be one way an angry parent may try to relieve some burden by having a well-mannered child at home. Shetgiri et al. (2012) suggested, once again that the protective factors found in children who were less likely to bully would be useful in the development of preventive interventions. Parents who seek help from their victimized child's school may demonstrate protective characteristics when interacting with teachers or school administrators.

Kokkinos and Panayiotou (2007) also provided their view on parenting and bullying and victimization, through they investigated students in elementary school. Their goal was to assess parenting locus of control (parent–child relationship) and discipline practices among parents, and bullying and victimization experiences among children of this school age. The 186 children and 160 parents who participated in the study represented locations of two semirural, one urban, and one rural area. Researchers studied a total of four schools in Cyprus. Kokkinos and Panayiotou hypothesized that parental discipline practices would predict children's involvement in bullying and victimization; and that children's behavior would help shape parental discipline practices through parental locus of control.

Findings for the first hypothesis were not sustained/supported (Kokkinos & Panayiotou, 2007). Results did not concur with previous evidence (e.g., Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Curtner-Smith et al., 2006; Georgiou, 2008a, 2008b; Shetgiri et al., 2012) that parental discipline practices and characteristics, such as authoritarian and authoritative disciplines, depressed or angry behaviors predicted children's bullying and victimization experiences/behaviors. The second hypothesis was partially supported, in that bullying provided an explanation, through a small but significant amount of variance in parenting practices. More importantly, parental locus of control dimensions significantly predicted parental discipline practices, such that the greater the external locus of control (i.e., chance or fate; external causes), the less effective the discipline practices (i.e., punishment and inconsistency) employed by parents. This result was also supported by correlations suggesting that parents of children who are aggressive as

bullies or bully/victims are somehow demonstrating consistency in their parenting (Kokkinos & Panayiotou, 2007).

With this result, one can emphasize the importance of a collaborative approach between families and schools for better understanding on bullying and victimization as part of parental and schools expectations to address bullying. Again, parental involvement that could lead to schools understanding parenting styles may also help determine the types of programs and policies schools could use to address bullying.

Mazefsky and Farrell (2005) examined the influence of witnessing violence, peer provocation, family support, and parenting practices (monitoring and discipline) on aggression in agricultural and rural communities. The study showed that ninth-grade students (boys and girls) who witnessed violence, peer provocation, low levels of family support, and poor parenting practices were related to higher frequencies of aggression among youth. Most importantly, parenting practices among all others showed a stronger influence on aggression and was consistent across gender.

The Mazefsky and Farrell (2005) study showed that family interaction had a great influence on peer interactions at school, as was discovered in the Ahmed and Braithwaite (2004) study. Mazefsky and Farrell suggested that future studies should examine the influence of specific components of parenting, and determine if these relations would vary depending on who (parent or child) is making the report, because this study only queried parent behaviors from the adolescents' perspectives. Given the study's findings, it is possible that parents and children of this population who live in rural or agricultural communities may find school antibullying programs less effective when there is a larger problem presented (i.e., poverty or low-income households) in communities and homes.

However, whole-school programs such as WITS and Friendly Schools, that included families and internal/external communities, could be effective when applied in such areas. With the proper resources, tools, and responses from schools, parents may recognize and improve their parenting practices. Parents of this demographics may benefit from whole-school programs, as parents learn what to expect and how or who to contact to address their child's victimization.

Cooper and Nickerson (2013) used a different notion to provide another perspective on bullying. Their study examined parents' history of bullying using their recollections of experiences, their role in bullying, the type of bullying they experienced, the impact it had on them, and when it occurred most frequently. A second aim of the study was to examine parental views and concerns regarding their middle school child's bullying behavior and how they reacted to their child's bullying. Of the 260 parents who participated in the study, each had at least one child who attended one of two suburban middle schools in the northeastern part of the United States. Both school districts were considered to have low SES, defined by the number of students who received free or reduced-price lunch. The second school had implemented an antibullying initiative in school year 2008–2009 (Cooper & Nickerson, 2013).

Results from this study indicated that 238 parents (90.3%) recalled being involved in bullying, whereas 9.7% reported they were uninvolved and unaware of bullying during their school days (Cooper & Nickerson, 2013). Some parents (34.5%) who recalled the experience reported seeing bullying occur rather than being involved (they were bystanders). Parents who reported their bullying experiences as victims totaled 133 (32.8%) and 2.5% indicated they were bullies. Of the 241 parents who responded to this

area, 57.3% reported their involvement with bullying as verbal bullying, 51.0% were of relational bullying by isolation, 36.5% by spreading rumors of peers, and 24.1% of physical bullying. Of the 152 who acknowledged their involvement in bullying, 45.5% recalled bullying was most frequently presented in middle or high school. As to parents' current views and level of concern regarding their own child's bullying experience/behavior, 98.2% advised their children to seek help from family/parents, and 97.3% encouraged the children to reach out to their teachers. Meanwhile, 86.2% suggested their children should avoid the situation. Of parents, 64.4% informed their child to never make fun of a bullying situation, whereas 44.1% suggested their child should not fight back and 42.3% reported that fighting back was the right thing to do. Furthermore, 89.8% talked about bullying with their child, 79.0% offered suggestions that would help them cope as victims, 74.0% helped their child develop ways to avoid having contact with bullies, and 34.4% reported contacting the parent of another child after a bullying incident (Cooper & Nickerson, 2013).

For the purposes of the present study, undergoing research on the "meaning of bullying of parents of a victimized child," it is noteworthy to recognize that Cooper and Nickerson's (2013) study suggested that parents' increased involvement with bullying in their youth may be a predictive factor in the described strategies implemented with their own child. This notion lends support to the need for parent involvement with antibullying initiatives in schools, and the kind of support/response parents of this population may expect from schools when their children encounter bullying. Parents who experienced bullying in their childhood days may be the most effective collaborators to sustain an

antibullying program in schools. Schools and parents can work hand-in-hand to determine the best approaches/methods to respond to bullying.

T. Cassidy (2009) examined the relationship among social identity, family and school context, problem-solving style, self-esteem, health behavior, psychological distress, and victimization of bullying. In exploring the relationship, T. Cassidy applied a quasiexperimental survey using 461 children between the ages of 11 and 15 years. Results showed that victims exhibited higher levels of psychological distress, lower self-esteem, more unhealthy behaviors, less family and teacher support, poorer problem-solving styles, and lower perceived social identity. Among these, the researcher found that the best predictors of victimization were students' sex, family situation, social identity and problem-solving style. With regard to parenting style, students with poor family relations/parental encouragement were likely to be bullied by their peers (T. Cassidy, 2009).

This finding is consistent with the findings of Ahmed and Braithwaite (2004), who related children who were victimized to "family disharmony" (pp. 45-46). It is possible that when children are exposed to poor family relations, they develop low general and social self-esteem, placing them as easier targets of bullying. Hence, the T. Cassidy (2009) study was able to correlate victimization and lower self-esteem, as children may appear weaker, or submissive, as suggested in Georgiou's (2008a) study. Parents must be mindful and aware of the impact their parenting style has on their children, as their own practice of parenting my lead to the child's victimization or bullying. Looking at parents' practice of parenting may correlate with how they report or address their child's victimization to school administrators and teachers. Also, depending

on which parenting styles or culture parents' of children who experienced school bullying practice, the parents' perceptions of school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family's dynamics may differ among parents after the incident of victimization has occurred with their children. The present study revealed the experiences and perspectives of this population by specifically using symbolic interactionism theory to better understand the associated meanings parents had with this phenomenon. In this exploration with symbolic interactionism theory, the present study gained understanding of how parents of a child victimized by bullying perceived their family dynamics as they were made aware of their children's victimization. Another area I reviewed when considering parents with the issue of bullying is, their household income level: SES. Specifically, the final section will examine the role parents' SES plays in their child's bullying or victimization.

Socioeconomic Issues and Bullying

With a direct and close look at SES (i.e., socioeconomic status/income status) and how it could be tied to bullying, Hong (2009) examined how schools responded to bullying and youth aggression from those of an upper/middle-class background and low SES neighborhoods, and the feasibility of successfully implementing the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in schools located in impoverished communities. This study may have been inspired because "many studies on bullying and school violence prevention programs in general have not considered the difference between schools located in middle-class neighborhoods and those in inner-city neighborhoods" (Hong, 2009, p. 85). Juvonen, Graham, and Schuster, and Walter, Gouze, and Lim (as cited in Hong, 2009) found that teachers in suburban neighborhoods and teachers in impoverished

schools received little help or training in how to effectively handle such situations in their host schools.

In addition, Hong (2009) found that teachers in inner-city schools were more reluctant to intervene when they witnessed bullying than their counterparts in suburban schools, due to having a low level of confidence. Hong also posited that although the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is one of the few whole-school programs that have been determined as an evidence-based program, little is still known about its efficacy in low-income schools with inadequate resources. Because other research suggested that parent involvement in the bullying-prevention program, intervention with victims and bullies, and classroom meetings with students to increase knowledge and empathy were all positive approaches to addressing and solving bullying, they may not be effective approaches in impoverished communities (Hong, 2009). Hong suggested that future studies must examine the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program's impact in inner-cities with a high level of neighborhood and family poverty. Without examining this program, the gap in this area may cause an increase of ineffective school responses to bullying, thereby leaving parents and students hopeless of attaining a safe school environment.

Singh and Ghandour (2012) examined the impact of neighborhood social conditions and household SES (i.e., perceived neighborhood safety, presence of garbage/litter in neighborhood, poor/dilapidated housing, and vandalism such as broken windows or graffiti; and parental education and household poverty status) on the prevalence of parent-reported behavioral problems among children between the ages of 6 to 17 years old in the United States. The researchers used the 2007 National Survey of Children's Health to develop a factor analytic index and a dichotomous measure of

serious behavioral problems (e.g., arguing, bullying, feelings of worthlessness, depression, and detachment) in children. The information/data collected for this study indicated higher levels of behavioral problems and their relation to socially disadvantaged neighborhoods and lower household SES (Singh & Ghandour, 2012). In other words, children who exhibited serious behavioral problem were living in unfavorable neighborhood conditions and were living below the poverty line (low SES) compared to those whose family income were above 400% of the poverty threshold (Singh & Ghandour, 2012).

As previously mentioned in discussing Curtner-Smith's et al. (2006) study, children living in poverty are susceptible to risk factors like behavioral problems (Singh & Ghandour, 2012). The Singh and Ghandour (2012) study suggested that neighborhood effects on children's behavioral outcomes might be further investigated in comparison to other neighborhoods and the availability of institutional resources like public libraries and recreation/community centers, social organization and interaction, neighborhood capital, and labor markets. Faced with these variables, the likelihood that schools can effectively work with parents on the issue of bullying and child victimization might be unlikely. However, collaboration with parents could encourage and support antibullying approaches that could satisfy parents' concerns about their child's victimization.

Nordhagen, Nielsen, Stigum, and Kohler (2005) conducted a study to determine the prevalence of bullying in the five Nordic countries (i.e., Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) during 1984 and 1996, and compared the results from the five countries to identify possible risk factors that cause bullying victimization. The researchers randomly selected children between the ages of 2 to 17 years for this

population-based study. Of the 6,000 total parents from 1984 and 1996 to whom they mailed postal questionnaires for participation in each country, altogether, only 20,000 questionnaires were completed. This review revealed that overall, 15.2% of the children were being bullied, which was an increase from 13.9% in 1984 to 16.5% in 1996. Bullying was more common in Denmark and Finland (20%) than in Sweden (7.2%). Boys between the ages of 2 and 6 and between 7 and 12 years were more likely to bully than girls. The study also found that children who had chronic conditions were at greater risk of being bullied than those without a condition. For example, in 1996, children who suffered from psychiatric/nervous problems and hyperactivity had higher risks of being bullied by their peers (Nordhagen et al., 2005). Equally important, children residing in single-parent homes and of parents with low educational background were likely to bully their peers.

This finding was consistent with the findings of Shetgiri et al. (2012), which indicated that parental characteristics like low educational attainment (not high school graduates), and lacking a two-parent household showed children at higher odds of demonstrating bullying behaviors toward their peers. Nordhagen et al. (2005) suggested that bullying is a common social problem that children and adolescents face throughout the world. Specifically, SES continues to play a great role in children's social behaviors. Again, schools in neighborhoods with low-income families may find it challenging to meet the expectations of parents whose children are faced with bully victimization; however, efforts to appropriately address the issue are imperative for all persons living in all districts.

Despite these findings (e.g., Nordhagen et al., 2005; Shetgiri et al., 2012; Singh & Ghandour, 2012) on the relationship among SES, parent-education level, and bullying, building on Mishna's (2004) study, showed "comparisons among the schools revealed similar frequencies of bullying as reported by the children, regardless of SES, parents' education level, percentage of single parent families, recent immigrants, and families living in subsidized housing" (Mishna et al., 2006, p. 267). For example, a teacher who taught in a school in the lower SES bracket believed that not only was the school described as "chaotic," but also the primary reason for teaching at such school was to obtain class-management skills (Mishna et al., 2006). This belief implied that teachers might only see their role as teaching, and nothing further (i.e., role model or protector). Meanwhile, another teacher from a school of a higher SES bracket described the school as "nice," but believed that bullying existed in the school just as much as in any other school, and the only difference was that it happened in a more covert manner and parents were not informed about their child's victimization (Mishna et al., 2006).

The Mishna et al. (2006) study suggested that increased training of students, parents, teachers, and school administrators must be established to address the various and subtle forms of bullying and factors that influenced these individuals' understanding and response to bullying. This study might also suggest that schools' relationship with parents and teachers' awareness of bully are stronger predictors, when compared with family SES. This study showed that schools' responses might differ between school districts, and teachers may only see their roles as educators in the classroom setting and not beyond; hence, they may not respond to bullying.

Last, Sourander et al. (2011) evaluated bullying from a slightly different angle. The researchers studied the predictive associations between bullying and adult criminal offenses. The sample consisted of 5,351 Finnish children who were born in 1981 with information about bullying and victimization at the age of 8, from parents, teachers, and themselves. The study showed that teacher reports of bullying at the age of 8 were a strong predictor of criminality in adulthood, especially among males. Female bullying or victimization at the age of 8 did not have an association with criminal acts in adulthood. Furthermore, victimization did not predict adult criminality unless other childhood psychopathology was included (Sourander et al., 2011). This is in line with the Nordhagen et al. (2005) findings, which affirmed that children with psychiatric/nervous problems and hyperactivity were likely to be in risk of being victimized. The Sourander et al. study also determined that when controlling for parental education level and psychopathology, bullying was sometimes present, and frequently and independently predicted violent property and traffic offenses. The study suggested that bullying among males could trigger an increased risk of adult criminal behaviors (Sourander et al., 2011).

The Sourander et al. (2011) study did not define or measure parental education level, leaving the conclusion relating to other studies' findings (i.e., Curtner-Smith et al., 2006; Nordhagen's et al. 2005; Singh & Ghandour, 2012; Shetgiri et al., 2012) that low parental education and low SES are predictors of bullying behaviors and victimization. This might be so, as parents with low education level may not have the awareness and knowledge to employ effective parenting skills that were proven to decrease bullying in the Burkhart et al. (2013) study. Parental involvement in bullying prevention is also important to establish in schools when children are young. Creating a relationship with

parents in school settings could lessen teachers' reports on bullying, thereby lessening the possibility of adult criminality, but ultimately, solidifying the responses that schools provide to parents whose children are victims of school bullying.

In summary, the articles in this section referenced the link between SES and children who are victims and bullies/perpetrators. Additional research such as the present study provide additional insight on how SES may relate to the experiences of parents' whose children were victims of school bullying. In other words, parents of high or low SES may experience their child's victimization of bullying differently; therefore, their meaning of bullying may also differ. However, with a more focused view, the present study engaged symbolic interactionism theory to obtain further insight on parents' experiences and perceptions of school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family's dynamics due to their children's victimization of bullying.

Conclusion

Researchers have explored most dynamics of school bullying as they pertain to bullying-prevention programs, peer mediation, parenting styles, parent SES and educational level, family environment, types of bullying, and parent involvement/awareness of their child's victimization. Of particular relevance to the present study, Humphrey and Crisp (2008), Bauman and Del Rio (2006), J. Brown et al. (2013), James (2012), Marshall et al. (2009), Maunder and Tattersall (2010), and Yoon and Kerber (2003), along with other researchers, explored the experiences of parents whose children were victims of school bullying and the roles and attitudes teachers and school administrators demonstrated. Additionally, these studies focused on teachers' and

school administrators' reactions to the issue and their definition or understanding of bullying.

The present study is unique in that it not only contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the area of parents' perception of school bullying, but also explored the "meaning" of bullying to parents' whose children were victimized in the school districts of Montgomery County and Prince Georges County, Maryland. The goal was to gain an understanding of how parents' experiences tie to their perceptions of school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family's dynamics, using symbolic interactionism theory for meaning, and as it relates to family dynamics. Put simply, understanding the meaning parents attach to their experiences of having a victimized child of bullying is important because, according to the aforementioned literature review, there is insufficient literature that speaks to parents of those who are bullied and their internal experiences. Also, I made no assumptions about how the SES or location (low income or high income; suburban) influenced the data. The main goal was for the data to guide my interpretations about what bullying means to parents' whose children were victimized; and how that may have contributed to how they perceived school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their own family's dynamics due to their children's victimization.

In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology used in the research. The methodology assisted me to explore the meaning of school bullying for parents' whose children have been victimized. In Chapter 3, I also mention the type of data analysis used as well as the ethical considerations of the study regarding the protection of participants' rights as human subjects.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the meaning of bullying for parents whose children were victimized at school. With the application of symbolic interactionism theory (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), as well as a phenomenological design, I explain the bullying phenomena from parents' perspective. The qualitative approach, which by definition allows the researcher to explore and to understand the meaning that individuals or groups have ascribed to a particular phenomenon, helped to guide this study (Creswell, 2009). I offer the rationale for the use of this qualitative methodology in the Research Design and Rationale section of this chapter. The main research question this study addressed was how parents whose children experienced school bullying perceived school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family's dynamics. This question provided a foundation and supported the selected methodology of the study. For instance, given the aforementioned research question, a phenomenological study generated responses that represented participants' overall feelings, opinions, behaviors, and personal understandings of school bullying.

In this chapter, I describe the research design and methodology I selected for this study. In my description, I also include information of the sample size; the study's setting; the data collection procedures; the quality of the research (i.e., reliability and validity of data procedures); my role as a researcher; and the types of data analysis methods I considered for application in the present study. Specifically, the study examined the data collected from parents of children victimized by school bullying, to obtain their perceptions regarding bullying, by identifying themes and patterns

discovered from the data analysis. Later in this chapter, I discuss methodological aspects such as research design and reasoning for such a study, the role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, ethical procedures, the summary of the chapter, and a brief transition to Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

The study used a phenomenological design, a qualitative strategy of inquiry used to explore the meaning or interpretation of a human phenomenon. This design was created to identify and describe the participants' subjective experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). I used this design to understand parents' perceptions of school bullying by conducting face-to-face interviews with each parent. Through individual interviews, I applied the phenomenological design to grasp and elucidate the common meaning and essence of the lived experiences of a phenomenon by a group of parents whose children are victims of bullying (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). I thoroughly reviewed information obtained from the interviews seeking themes and patterns that described the attitudes and beliefs these parents have toward school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family's dynamics. In summary, employing the phenomenological design rendered understanding of what the phenomenon was like through the eyes of parents whose children had direct experience with school bullying (Hays & Wood, 2011). The phenomenological paradigm allows researchers to focus their studies on the experiences of the participants, rather than those of the researcher (Peyton, 2012). Doing this also allows researchers to bracket themselves out of the study, setting aside their knowings or judgments (i.e., epoche) and refrain from influencing the interpretation of

the study's findings (Hays & Wood, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). In a sense, the phenomenological approach helps researchers transform the world into mere phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). Similarly, when a researcher employs a *transcendental* phenomenological study, thoughts will be perceived as if for the first time (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). This practice, referenced as epoche, allows the researcher to refrain from judgment by setting aside personal experiences as much as possible (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). Hence, transcendental phenomenology encourages researchers to search for the meaning of participants' experiences of the phenomenon (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

To aid in obtaining information-rich data, the following subquestions were developed to undergird the study:

1. How did parents initially experience the victimization of their child from school bullying?
2. How do parents of a child victimized by school bullying go about reporting their child's victimization?
3. What are the feelings of parents of a victimized child of school bullying, after learning of their child's victimization?
4. What types of responses, advocacy, or support do parents of a victimized child of school bullying receive when reporting their child's victimization?

Researcher's Role

In this study, my role as the researcher was to focus on identifying and describing the commonalities of participants' experiences of the phenomenon and serve as a key/primary instrument in collecting data through interviews (Creswell, 2009, 2013).

Furthermore, it was critical that I emphasized that part of my role as a researcher in this study was being able to recognize and eliminate any possible biases that may have jeopardized the findings of the study. In addition to potential bias, I also prohibited my values and personal background or experience (i.e., gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status: SES) to shape the interpretations that formed during the study (Creswell, 2009). Moustakas (1994) supported this assertion that researchers must separate themselves from their own consciousness and not be engrossed in it, as it will not allow researchers to understand participants' perceived experiences.

For ethical considerations, I sought permission from participants to record the interviews before they began their participation, by using a consent form. The consent form provided participants with background information about the purpose of the study; it explained the procedures of the study, the nature of the study, any possible risks and benefits of participating in the study, the protection of participants' rights that is tied to the practice of confidentiality, and provision of the my contact information regarding questions or concerns of participants. I also obtained permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), following Walden University guidelines to protect the human rights of my participants. Upon receiving my approval letter from the IRB, I provided a copy to all persons, to secure permission to perform my study (Creswell, 2009). Last, to obtain rich and substantial information from the study, I was able to delve deeper into participants' experiences by going beyond the interview guide. This in-depth approach manifested through constant probing in conversations with participants (Creswell 2009, 2013).

Methodology

Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection

I selected participants using purposeful sampling. In purposeful sampling, the researcher is able to use a sample of participants with some characteristics or qualities that represent the population undergoing study (Koerber & McMichael, 2008; Patton, 2002). In other words, I strategically and purposefully selected the participants that could help "illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Also, purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select participants or sites and the sampling strategy and size of the sample that will best assist the researcher in understanding the problem and answering the research questions identified for the study (Creswell, 2009, 2013). Researchers must select information-rich cases that lead to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Having information-rich cases supports the concept of saturation, when additional data collected does not contribute to the study or the theoretical framework (Mason, 2010; Seidman, 2012); put simply, no new data emerges from additional data, other than what was previously discovered. Saturation can be reached quickly or slowly, depending on the qualitative sample size and the researcher's length of examination (Mason, 2010). In the case of this study, I reached saturation at the early stages of data analysis.

Further, Polkinghorne (as cited in Creswell, 2013) recommended "that researchers interview from 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon" (p. 81). Having a small number of participants is preferable and can be valuable, especially for in-depth, information-rich cases. However, in general, sample size in qualitative inquiry is quite flexible and depends on what the researcher is trying to understand, the purpose

of the study, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the amount of time and resources available (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2012). Seidman (2012) asserted that the number of participants in doctoral research (such as the present study) might be determined by practical exigencies of time, money, and the availability of participants. The key is for the sample size to support the study's purpose rather than to focus on the number of participants (Patton, 2002). Moreover, qualitative research is concerned with discerning the meaning, rather than relying on frequencies and making generalized hypothetical statements (Mason, 2010). Thus, I selected a sample size of six parents with children enrolled in elementary school, middle school, or high school for the study.

Data Collection Procedures

By using the purposeful sampling style, I gained knowledge about the issue that is of central importance, while also being able to maintain focus on the purpose of the inquiry through information-rich cases. Further, obtaining information-rich cases brought insights and in-depth understanding to the study rather than empirical generalizations on the topic (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, because phenomenological inquiry is an approach of qualitative research, I used an *inductive* style of inquiry in the data collection and data analysis processes. I then used data that emerged from participants' rich descriptions of the phenomena to interpret the meaning of the data, providing an inductive style of specific information to a general or broader understanding and meaning of the information gathered (Creswell, 2009). Through inductive data analysis, qualitative researchers build patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up, "rather than handed down entirely from a theory or from the perspectives of the inquirer," which

allows researchers to organize the data into various abstract units of information (Creswell, 2013, p. 22). Such an inductive process illustrates how researchers work back and forth between the themes and the database until they establish a comprehensive set of themes (Creswell, 2009). I discuss this concept in greater detail in Chapter 4.

The data collection procedure was in the form of in-depth interviews. I conducted semistructured interviews and an audiotape to allow flexibility. Although researchers experience advantages and disadvantages from using a more structured or less structured approach, Maxwell (2013) asserted,

> some qualitative researchers believe that, because qualitative research is necessarily inductive, any substantial prior structuring of the methods leads to a lack of flexibility to respond to emergent insights, and can create methodological "tunnel vision" in making sense of your data. (p. 88)

Therefore, to ensure the accuracy of participants' information, I not only audiotaped and recorded interviews in field notes, but also had them professionally transcribed to capture data accuracy (Creswell, 2009, 2013). The interviews consisted of open-ended questions that encouraged me to probe and obtain clarification for better understanding of the information the participants wanted to convey. I created an interview guide/protocol to systematically obtain information from participants (Creswell, 2009). Samples of the interview-guide questions include, What were your initial experiences like due to your child's victimization? Why does that moment resonate with you? What steps or actions did you take about your child's victimization? Why was it important for you to take action? What were the responses of teachers and school

administrators to your child's victimization? Can you elaborate? What did their responses mean to you?

I expected each interview to last between 45 minutes and an hour. I considered applying Seidman's (2012) three-interview series model where three separate interviews would be conducted with each participant, so that in-depth knowledge of the participants' experiences were obtained through more interactions with the participants. However, due to participants' schedules and availabilities, I interviewed each participant only once. Also, as part of this interviewing protocol, I sent participants a thank-you statement to acknowledge their time to take part in the study (Creswell, 2009). Again, I based the frequency of data collection events on participants' availability, and interviewed each participant individually, to allow concentration and collection of details.

After completing interviews, as I no longer required participants to be engaged or provide further information in the study, as a form of debriefing, I thanked participants for their time and reassured them that the information would be used for the purposes of this study and their identity would remain anonymous. I also asked participants if they had any questions about the study and how they felt now that interview was completed. I asked participants to provide their mailing address if they wished to learn about the results of the study. Also, I gave participants the opportunity to read their transcripts and make comments wherever they saw fit. I sent some of the transcripts to participants with a self-addressed envelope and a postage stamp for its return to me, whereas I sent others by email, using a password-protected encrypted feature to ensure confidentiality. As a follow-up procedure, I provided participants with my contact information in case they later discovered they would like to share additional information that may be pertinent to

the study, or would like to elaborate. Participants and I agreed they would contact me if I needed follow-up conversations/meetings.

Setting of the Study

The site at which data was collected was a natural setting for participants that best suited their needs. Creswell (2009) asserted,

> Qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study. This up close information is gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research. In the natural setting, the researchers have face-to-face interaction over time. (p. 175)

Providing an environment in which participants would be comfortable and safe was also a key element, as I arranged the setting or location. Data in qualitative research can be anything the researcher sees or hears, or that participants communicate to the researcher (Maxwell, 2013). In other words, data go beyond what participants say and includes observations and documents. Thus, being in a natural setting may have encouraged information-rich cases that added value to the findings.

I interviewed participants in their cars in front of a pubic facility and in their homes. Participants represented two school districts—Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) and Prince Georges County Public Schools (PGCPS)—in the State of Maryland. I describe the type of sampling and data collection, purposeful sampling, in detail in the Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection Section.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Plan

Upon completion of data collection, I analyzed the data using Gibbs and Taylor's (2005) and Ryan and Bernard's (2003) data-analysis techniques for coding the data. Also, in the data analysis process, I implemented Creswell's (2013) and Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen data-analysis method. In Chapter 4, I describe the steps suggested by these authors. Coding allows researchers to sort and compare data in one category to another, while giving researchers the opportunity to assign labels to pieces of the data that describe the meaning of each area of the data. I coded and compared the data until recognizable patterns and concepts began to emerge from the data. Once a category showed consistency in relation to other categories, I classified it as the core category. The constant-comparison method continued until no new patterns emerged from the data; this means the data had reached saturation (or a theory had emerged). In the case of further exploration of the data, I coded and analyzed data using open coding. Open coding is the initial stage of comparative analysis that encourages researchers to code the data in every possible way (Walker & Myrick, 2006). In open coding, researchers immerse themselves in the data by reading each line, sentence, and paragraph, to code "the data in as many ways as possible and writing memos about the conceptual and theoretical ideas that emerge during the course of analysis" (Walker & Myrick, 2006, p. 551). Again, the process of open coding stops when researchers begin to notice the possibility of saturation or a theory that embraces the entire data (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

A final step I took into consideration was memo writing. Memo writings are short documents that allow researchers to write down their thoughts and impressions

(throughout the study) as they proceed through or review the data. I also used memo-writings to capture nonverbal expressions and emotions that participants demonstrated during the interview sessions, as well as to take notes of my reactions to their experiences (Sbaraini, Carter, Evans, & Blinkhorn, 2011).

As another possible strategy to analyze data collected from this study, I analyzed interview data using Ryan and Bernard's (2003) and Gibbs and Taylor's (2005) ways of identifying themes and codes, and Creswell's (2013) modified version of Moustakas' (1994) Stevick–Colaizzi–Keen method, which are appropriate tools for a phenomenological analysis. Qualitative researchers should begin data analysis immediately after their first interview or observation is completed, and continue to analyze the data throughout the research process, stopping only to write up the research (Maxwell, 2013). Before delving into data analysis from my interviews, I organized the data by applying Gibbs and Taylor's (2005) hand-coding technique to code the data. Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggested qualitative researchers use the 12 methods described below. For this study, the methods I applied were word repetitions, key-words-in-context, comparing and contrasting, and pawing (each bolded below).

1. The **word repetitions** method requires the researcher to look for commonly used words; indigenous categories are terms used by respondents with particular meaning and significance.
2. **Indigenous categories** are terms used by respondents with particular meaning and significance.
3. **Key-words-in-context** are terms in phrases and sentences.

4. By **comparing and contrasting**, researchers conduct constant comparison (inherent in grounded theory) of how themes differ or are similar from the preceding or following statements.
5. **Social science queries** introduce social science explanation and theories to explain conditions, actions, interactions, and consequences of a phenomenon.
6. **Searching for missing information**, researchers look for what is not being stated or being done, but what the researcher would have expected to find.
7. **Metaphors and analogies** are used to indicate a central belief about things and how respondents feel about issues.
8. **Transitions** are the turns conversation takes as well as the narrative use of story structures.
9. **Connectors** create connections between causal (i.e., since, because, as, etc.) or logical (i.e., implies, means, is one of, etc.) terms.
10. **Unmarked texts** examines text that was ignored or not coded as a theme.
11. **Pawing** requires scanning the text by circling, underlining, using colored highlighters, running colored lines down margins as an indicator of different meanings and coding, looking for patterns and significance.
12. **Cutting and sorting** allows researchers to cut up transcripts and collect similar codes into piles, envelopes, or folders or pasting them onto cards, and laying them out for rereading (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Creswell's (2013) modified version of Moustakas' (1994) Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's phenomenological analysis process entailed six steps: (a) the researcher describes personal experiences of the phenomenon being studied; (b) the researcher develops a list

of significant statements of participants' experiences; (c) the researcher groups significant statements into larger units of information, called themes or "meaning units;" (d) the researcher writes a description of "what" the participants' experienced in the phenomenon (also called, "textural description" of the experience); (e) the researcher writes "how" the experience occurred (also called, "structural description") and also considers the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced by participants; and (f) the researcher writes a composite description of the phenomenon by combining the textural and structural descriptions (pp. 193–194).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Evaluation of Quality Research

Qualitative researchers aim to understand deep structural knowledge that derives from personally interacting with participants, spending a long period of time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meanings from participants (Creswell, 2013). At the conclusion of the investigation, researchers ask themselves, "Did we get it right?", and "Did we publish an inaccurate account?" One way to answer these questions in researchers' minds is by evaluating the quality of the research. Qualitative researchers can benefit from using the following terms to validate their research for trustworthiness: (a) credibility, (b)authenticity, (c) transferability, (d) dependability, and (e) confirmability (Creswell, 2013). Transferability indicates replicating the same study during the same time. In other words, given this topic of school bullying, transferability may be difficult to apply if changes and growth have occurred in the area. However, if researchers perform the study using the same school districts, transferability may indeed be supported.

Transferability is when findings of the study can be applied to other situations—demonstrating *external validity* (Shenton, 2004).

Triangulation is the process of using multiple and different data sources, methods, investigations, and theories in an effort to compare and cross-check the consistency of information gathered at different times (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Triangulation aligns with the concept of *dependability.* Member checking, which means applying the concept of *credibility,* requires solicitation of participants' review for accuracy and credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2009, 2013). This study applied member checking by asking participants to review their responses to the interview questions.

Establishing credibility, researchers seek to establish adoption of the research method of the qualitative investigation in the general arena of social science research; researchers produce authenticity by applying the abovementioned terms (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability); dependability shows that when the research is repeated in the same context, with all of the same elements as the original study, similar results will be obtained, illustrating reliability. Also, the concept of confirmability encourages researchers to compare objectivity, taking steps to ensure that the study's findings are a true representation of participants' experiences and not of the researchers' preferences and characteristics (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Shenton, 2004).

Applying the terms above for research quality justifies the research findings. Validation strategies I used in this study and that are closely related with the aforementioned terms are confirmability (through member checking), and credibility (through member checking; Creswell, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

I demonstrated and upheld ethical considerations throughout the data collection process. To ensure ethical treatment of participants, participants reviewed and signed the informed-consent form prior to participating in the study. I informed participants about their participation, explaining they were not obligated to remain in the study, as it was voluntary. Research began upon receiving approval from Walden University's IRB. Also, I have become knowledgeable about the treatment of human participants through the National Institute of Health training and, I have obtained my certification on March 25, 2012. Furthermore, I used the schools district county (i.e., Montgomery County and Prince Georges County) to indicate the school areas used in this study, to maintain the schools' anonymity. On the day of data collection, I provided participants verbal instructions and I safeguarded participants' identity by applying numbers rather than their names, to ensure confidentiality. Last, before starting interviewing sessions, I informed participants of the purpose and procedure of the study and that it would be used to satisfy my doctor of philosophy degree from Walden University. I also sought to identify any potential risks or harm that may have prevented individuals from participating in the study. Upon completion of the interviews, I debriefed individuals who participated in the study. The debriefing process entailed providing individuals with the opportunity to review their responses from the interviews, to establish transparency and accuracy of the data collected. At this time, I encouraged individuals to ask questions relating to the study. I told individuals who wished to learn about the findings of the study to contact me and I would make the information available to them.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the qualitative research design that I employed for this study. I chose the phenomenological approach to answer the research questions because this approach supports understanding of a phenomenon and what it means to participants. In this study I explored how parents of a child victimized by school bullying perceived school administrators, teachers, antibullying programs or policies, and their family's dynamics, given their lived experiences.

Chapter 4 provides readers with the findings from this study. Chapter 5 informs readers of the interpretation of the findings and their implications for social change. In Chapter 5, I discuss recommendations for actions, and lend suggestions for future studies.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to examine the meaning of school bullying from the perspectives of parents whose children were or had been victims of bullying. The study was designed to employ symbolic interactionism theory (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), which allowed me to further explore the meaning of school bullying from parents' interactions with their child's school. This study was guided by the following research question: How do parents whose children experienced school bullying perceive school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family dynamics? The subquestions for this study included the following: (a) How did parents initially experience the victimization of their child from school bullying?; (b) How do parents of a child victimized by school bullying go about reporting their child's victimization?; (c) What are the feelings of parents of a victimized child of school bullying, after learning of their child's victimization?; and (d) What types of responses, advocacy, or support do parents of a victimized child of school bullying receive when reporting their child's victimization? The researcher's General Interview Guide/Protocol, which consisted of 11 questions asked during the face-to-face interviews, appears in Appendix A.

In this chapter, I describe the demographics and characteristics of participants, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results of the study. This chapter concludes with a summary of answers to the research questions.

Demographics

There were seven participants in this study, and their age range was 24 to 43 years. All participants self-reported age, gender, marital status, educational achievement level, child's educational level (current), child's gender, ethnic or cultural background, socioeconomic class, and place of residency (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participants	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Age	33	41	37	36	41	43	24
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Marital status	Single	Single	Single	Divorced	Married	Single	Single
Educational achievement level	Some college	Some college	Some college	Some college	Master's degree	High school diploma	GED
Child's educational level (current)	Elementary school	High school	High school	High school	Elementary school	Elementary school	Elementary school
Child's gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male
Ethnic/ cultural background	African American	African American	African American	African American	Other (Black)	African American	Hispanic–Latino
Socioeconomic class	Middle class	Middle class	Middle class	Working class	Middle class	Poor	Working class

Table 2

Place of Residency

Participants	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Residency	Montgomery County	Montgomery County	Montgomery County	Montgomery County	Montgomery County	Prince George's County	Montgomery County

Data Collection

The data collection process started after I received approval from Walden University's Institutional Research Board (IRB). Walden University's approval number to conduct this study is 11-11-14-0295632. I collected data for this study from seven participants during the months of November and December 2014. I used purposeful sampling to ensure potential participants had direct experience and knowledge in the area of school bullying to best help me understand the problem and the research questions (Creswell, 2009). Data collection included digital voice recordings, field notes, and memo writing. During the data collection process, I developed field notes in an attempt at epoche, setting aside biases, prejudgments, and preconceptions about participants' phenomena that was undergoing examination (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) asserted, "Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences" (p. 84). Epoche allowed me to understand the phenomena from the participants' own points of view. I was able to record my reflections and discoveries during each interview session as part of memo writing.

The data collection process initially began with identifying potential participants by handing out flyers outside nearby public schools, shopping centers, local public libraries, recreation centers, public transit areas, and churches in Montgomery County and Prince Georges County, Maryland (see Appendices B and C). Along with the flyers was a copy of the Letter of Introduction (see Appendix D) so potential participants were made fully aware of their role in the study and the purpose of the study. I also contacted potential participants through social media (e.g., Facebook), using approved correspondence from Walden University's IRB (see Appendix E). To protect individuals'

privacy, I asked potential participants targeted on Facebook to contact me directly on my personal cell phone number, Walden's e-mail account, or through Facebook's private inbox messaging feature. Potential participants who expressed interest in participating in the study contacted me; I gave or sent them consent forms (see Appendix F) through encrypted e-mail, in person, or through the U.S. postal service. Once participants returned the signed consent form and demographics survey (see Appendix G), I called or e-mailed them to set a time and date to conduct the in-depth interview. After completing the interviews, I sent the recorded dialogue to the transcriptionists (see Appendix H), then sent transcripts to participants for review and validation before undertaking data analysis.

Four interviews took place in participants' homes, whereas three were in the participants' cars. Interviews held in the participants' cars took place in front of a local library, restaurant, and the participant's place of employment. Although I scheduled interviews to last 45 minutes to 1 hour (agreed by participants), most interviews lasted less time due to participants' schedule/availability (see Table 3). I interviewed participants once and told them they could contact me to schedule a follow-up interview, if they desired to share additional information. Even though the interviews seemed rushed, as participants were limited to a set/restricted time to participate in the interviews, I believe I was able to still conduct in-depth interviews that provided rich information using the Interview Guide/Protocol to guide the study.

Table 3

Interview Schedule

Participant	Date	Start time	Length in interview minutes	Location	School location
P1	11/16/14	2:30 pm	29:05	Car	Montgomery County
P2	11/17/14	4:45 pm	24:14	Home	Montgomery County
P3	11/19/14	4:00 pm	29:04	Home	Montgomery County
P4	11/19/14	7:30 pm	35:12	Car	Montgomery County
P5	11/23/14	4:30 pm	43:38	Home	Montgomery County
P6	12/01/14	5:00 pm	25:33	Home	Prince George's County
P7	12/03/14	12:30 pm	25:47	Car	Montgomery County

As the primary source of data collection, I used a digital voice recorder and a journal for field notes to capture participant interviews. After all interviews were completed, I transferred the digital audio recordings to my personal computer and later forwarded them to my designated professional transcriptionists to transcribe the recordings verbatim. I was the only person who could access the computer and it was password protected. I kept all materials pertaining to the participants, such as field notes, interview recordings (audiorecorder and transcripts), consent forms, and demographic surveys locked in a cabinet in my home for safekeeping. I also assigned the participants pseudonyms to track speakers on the transcripts; each participant was identified by a series of numbers on the digital audio file (see Table 4).

Table 4

Participants' Identification

Participant	Digital audio identification number
P1	Z0000005
P2	120201_001 & 120203_001
P3	120203_002
P4	120205_001
P5	120207_001
P6	120216_001
P7	120217_001

A semistructured interview using open-ended questions allowed me to gather rich in-depth information from participants. Thus, I was able to record information participants believed was pertinent to their experience with bullying, while paying attention to the words they chose to describe their experience and the nonverbal expressions they shared during the interview. I included nonverbal expressions (i.e., crossed arms, eye contact, demeanor, and holding head) in the field notes and memo writing. In addition to the 11 questions prepared for the General Interview Guide/Protocol, I also asked probing questions to gain clarity or more depth from participants' responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Questions on the General Interview Guide/Protocol supported and aimed to answer the main research question and four subquestions of this doctoral study. The questions on the Interview Guide/Protocol explored parents' experiences, their definition of bullying before and after the child became a victim, the schools' responses or support to child's victimization of bullying, antibullying policies or programs, how parents felt about their child's victimization of

bullying, the steps parents took to address bullying incidents, parents' perspectives of teachers' awareness and involvement with bullying, indicators of bullying, family dynamics in the home after/during bullying, and what their experiences meant to them.

Originally, the intent of this study was to collect data using snowball sampling and purposeful sampling methods, interviews with parents and teachers, and application of the grounded theory method to analyze data and to understand the effects of bullying on the family's dynamics through the discovery of a theory. However, before the data collection began, Walden University's IRB approved the refined research methods described later in this chapter.

All participants were enthusiastic participants in the study and shared their experiences in face-to-face interviews; however, P3 and P6 showed anger and frustration in their tone when describing their child's victimization, causing me to reflect further on their experiences. The others (P1, P2, P4, and P5) were quite calm; P7 appeared to be very tense/nervous, but communicated openly during the interview. To put the participants at ease, I offered my empathy as they spoke, even though I became somewhat uncomfortable when P3 and P6 raised their voices in anger and frustration. Specifically, I showed empathy through my body posture and facial expressions, statement of sympathy, sharing a brief example of my own similar experience, and through my follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Data Analysis

After I completed each interview, I listened to the audiorecordings several times to explore the meaning of participants' lived experiences of their child's victimization of school bullying (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). I reviewed the transcripts to check

for obvious mistakes that may have been made during transcription (Creswell, 2009). I also listened to the audiorecordings to ensure they matched the transcripts. In addition, after participants reviewed their transcripts to ensure accuracy (member checking), I reviewed the written transcripts multiple times by circling, highlighting, and underlining statements and words that had significant relevance to the research questions. This process is also considered as open coding (Creswell, 2013). Again, the data analysis process was a process that involved epoche to gain understanding of participants' experiences from their point of view. This process/practice supported my attempt to set aside any possible preconceived ideas and expectations and reduce my bias regarding school bullying, so that I could see things as they appeared (Moustakas, 1994). I continued to review my field notes in my journal and record any new thoughts and impressions that emerged throughout the data analysis process. In short, applying memo writing in this way offered an outlet that allowed me to make mental notes about data as they occurred. Using memo writing also allowed me to capture impressions about participants and their nonverbal signals during interactions in the interviews.

Adhering to Gibbs and Taylor's (2005) and Ryan and Bernard's (2003) data analysis process, I hand coded and delimited the data from code units to larger representations by grouping them into categories and themes. I also applied Creswell's (2013) and Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen data analysis method to organize and analyze the data. Gibbs and Taylor's data analysis process allowed me to code my data by looking for keywords and concepts relevant to the research questions. By applying Ryan and Bernard's data analysis process, I was able to organize data using word repetition, key-words-in-context, compare and contrast/constant

comparison, pawing, and sorting (as previously mentioned in Chapter 3). In regard to Creswell's and Moustakas' modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, I used the authors' suggested method of phenomenological analysis by prescribing the following steps in my data analysis process: (a) describe personal experiences with the phenomenon without including feelings/biases (known as epoche); (b) develop a list of significant statements from the verbatim transcripts (also referred to as *horizontalizing/horizontalization*); (c) group the significant statements into larger units/categories of information known as *meaning units* or *themes*; (d) write a *textural* description of "what" the participants experienced in the phenomenon—what happened; (e) write a *structural* description of "how" the participants experienced the phenomenon; and (f) present a narration of the phenomenon using both textural and structural descriptions to develop the "essence" of the experience and to synthesize and culminate the aspect of the phenomenological study. Throughout this process of data analysis, I also used the concept of constant comparison by continually asking myself the following questions, "What is this about/What does it represent?" "What are the participants saying?" and "How does it differ from the preceding or following comments?" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). As a result of this comparison, it ensured that my coding was consistent with each category.

For example, as an illustration of how I applied Creswell's (2013) and Moustakas's (1994) modification of Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's method of analysis (mentioned above) to my data, the first step of describing my personal experiences with the phenomena involved writing memos. In this process, I read each participant's transcript and jotted notes of what I experienced or saw in the phenomenon. And in turn,

this step allowed me to remove my biases (epoche) and focus only on what transpired during the interviews. In the second step, which involved horizontalization (again, based on the verbatim statements from the transcripts), I began to create a list of words and statements that were significant to the study. I compared them to the perceptions of school bullying, factors that participants associated with their feelings, their approach to addressing bullying to the school, the feedback or support participants received from the school, and participants' experiences as they initially learned of their child's victimization. I gave each statement of the phenomenon equal worth. By this, it resulted in the development of codes from the data/transcripts.

In the third step, I grouped the words and statements into clusters that represented similar meaning units or categories or themes (discussed below) that later became general or core themes of the experience and parents' meaning of school bullying. This third step brought forth the significant categories/themes that were identified in the data. The fourth step allowed me to examine the textural description to reveal "what" happened with the phenomenon of school bullying, based on participants' experiences, and with verbatim quotations for support, whereas the fifth step helped me uncover structural description of "how" participants experienced school bullying, with verbatim examples discussed below. Therefore, the fourth and fifth steps allowed me to revisit the transcripts and my memo writings, in order to arrive at the textural and structural descriptions of the data. Steps 4 and 5 led to the ultimate goal of bringing forth the "essence" of the school bullying phenomena in Step 6. In Step 6, I incorporated the textural and structural descriptions to develop the meaning of the phenomena of school bullying from the perspectives of participants, as intended for this study. In applying this step, I was able to develop a

narrative of the phenomena. The narrative consists of the nature of the phenomena and the discovery made from the phenomena (which is comprised throughout this chapter).

Codes, Keywords, Concepts, Categories, and Themes (Meaning Units)

According to Creswell (2013), researchers can form a list of 25-30 tentative codes, regardless of the size of the data. In this study, 33 codes emerged, but of those 33, nine were combined with an original code, yielding a list of 24 codes that were initially identified. Codes are the names the researcher composes that best describe the information, or they can be *in vivo* codes, the exact words used by participants (Creswell, 2013). Creswell asserted that researchers use codes, categories, and themes interchangeably in qualitative data analysis.

The individual, semistructured, face-to-face interviews provided an impressive amount of rich data, and my coding started with pawing. This involved reading the transcripts line by line and identifying keywords (codes). Through this exercise, I began the process that led to concepts and, ultimately, emerging themes (categories). According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), pawing in qualitative data analysis allows the researcher to discern areas in the text that are significant to the study. By reading and rereading the data, I was able to compare it to previous data; I made notes to myself for later referencing, if needed. This line-by-line reading and coding of data resulted in a list of words used repeatedly by participants that also had real meaning to participants. This was conveyed through the words, the statements preceding and following these words, the nonverbal cues, and the number of participants who used the words in a similar manner. Table 5 illustrates the resulting list of identified keywords. After reading each transcript

multiple times, keywords emerged that seemed to have significant meaning for participants. Closely perusing these keywords allowed me to identify their relevance.

Anything/Nothing

Almost all participants in the study used these words most as they described the responses they received from their child's school. Although P4 did not use these words, P4 did refer to the teacher as not taking action to stop the bullying due to being unaware: "And I'm not sure how he didn't know what was going on. …The art teacher said he was unaware of the issues." As I read and reread these sentences, I interpreted them to mean that perhaps nothing was being done to stop the bullying because the teacher was not aware of it occurring.

Table 5

Keywords Frequently Used by Participants

Keyword	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Anything/nothing	7	2	2		1	5	6	23
Negative	1		1		1			3
Continue	2					1	2	5
Worse		5						5
Bad	2	2		2	1			7
Stern	1		1					2
Serious/ignore		2	3	3	1	2	2	13
Frustrated	2	3	3	1	1	1	2	13
Angry			2			1		3
Worry						1		1
Terrified		1						1
Upset		1					4	5
Helpless				2	2		1	5
Hard				3	3			6
Homeschool				2	2	2		6
Problem				1	3		1	5
Consequence				4	7		1	12
Suggestions	4			2	9	1	9	25
Follow up	1	1		2	7			11
Never/Ever	2	4	1		3	3		13
Blame/fault	3					8		11
Hurt/painful	2		5			3		10
Constantly/repeatedly			5				1	6
Paper/file/form/e-mail	3		1	9		12	6	31

All the other parents/participants used the words ***anything/nothing*** interchangeably at least once:

> And then again had to file the papers through Montgomery County and again still not aware if ***anything*** was ever done about it, ***nothing*** was ever informed of me

> that they ever spoke to the student, his parents, was he punished for it in any kind of way, will he be in for future—***nothing*** was ever addressed after that, towards me anyway, it never was brought to my attention ever again. (P1)

"And I didn't hear ***anything*** else about that either. …The response was of ***nothing.*** …So this is why I was so surprised when they did ***nothing.***" (P1)

"But as far as the school went, ***nothing***." (P1)

"They didn't do ***anything***." (P2)

"They teacher didn't do ***anything,*** it seemed like she didn't." (P2)

"They wouldn't do ***anything***." "No one's doing ***anything***." (P3)

"I heard ***nothing*** on Thursday." (P5)

"Yes, and they never say ***nothing***, don't make no action, no ***nothing***." (P6)

> If I'm taking action and he's telling me this and they're not doing ***anything*** about it, it's stressful, because nobody wants to come home every day and ask their child how was your day today, and he's upset, or he's feeling a certain type of way because he's being bullied. (P7)

Negative

Three participants used the word ***negative*** in the context of their experience with bullying and with their child's school. When I asked P1 to clarify the experiences in the daughter's school as she tried to address her victimization of bullying, P1 replied: "A very, very much so ***negative***."

"It's all the way ***negative***, all the way wrong." (P3)

"I think to be honest with you that was a very ***negative*** experience, but I think that—and just as a parent, as a woman, and her being a female, the focus was on trying to empower her" (P5).

Continue

This keyword emerged from the data among three individuals. The participants revealed similarities in their concerns regarding bullying being a continuous issue. In the individual interviews,

"The bullying just ***continued***." (P1)

"Only in America here I see bully be ***continue*** to, until the victim—look at them when they kill themself, commit suicide because look what my son said, he's going to kill himself, when he never said that before." (P6)

Although this participant did not directly use the term continue, P7 did use it in a context that allowed me to interpret it as such:

> And he's saying he's telling the teacher or he's telling whoever the staff is during recess that he's getting bullied, and he's coming home again telling me he's *still getting bullied. ...*It was just like *it's going on and on*, and it's like there's this one particular kid I know that he says bullying him but then there's also this little girl that is as well, so. (P7)

Worse

Of the seven participants in this study, only one repeatedly mentioned the word ***worse*** to describe experiences with school bullying:

> And it didn't get it better, seemed like it got ***worse*** because you guys if you did something or you said something, the matter got ***worse*** because she started

> retaliating, doing stuff, little stuff but it was bigger because she was crying and stuff, didn't want to go to school. …The school didn't. Or if they did it was just like making it ***worse*** by we're observing it. And I didn't understand how they observed it when they're in the office. Who's observing it? (P2)

As part of my comparison among participants' responses, I noticed that P3 also used the word worse, but in the sense that bullying as a whole is getting worse, not as a reference to the child's situation. P3 said, "I think a lot of parents and a lot of people need to speak out more about bullying because it's not getting any better, it's getting worse." I interpreted this to mean P3 believes bullying is getting worse due to the school's lack of appropriate response in handling the problem.

Bad

Four participants used this word. They used it to describe how they felt after learning about their child's victimization of school bullying:

"I felt ***bad*** for her." (P1)

"I felt ***bad*** for her because then I was like it's my job as a parent, I have to get it straight." (P2)

"Yeah, I felt really ***bad*** for her." (P2)

"And I felt ***bad*** for her. And in addition to myself, her brother felt really ***bad*** for her because he's the older and he kind of was like, we can't even protect her from this" (P4).

> So for me it was a lot of feelings because you feel ***bad,*** and I think for her she wanted me to protect her and I take her and I went and then I did what I could so she knows I'm going to be supporting you. (P5)

Stern

Two participants used the terms ***stern*** and ***sternness*** to describe their reaction to the bully/perpetrator when their child's school was not addressing the issue appropriately. In the interviews, both participants said:

"And he got that ***sternness***, and I haven't necessarily seen it from him anymore" (P1).

"I actually got on the bus and through, you know, I was basically very ***stern*** with the student and I told him, "Leave my son alone or I'm calling the police" (P3).

Serious/Ignore

These words were not always used directly by most participants, but both words indicated their perspectives on how the schools handled bullying. I combined these words based on the context in which participants used the words, or how they conceptualized the words: "My perspective of it was that they just see children, they're elementary school, and they feel like what can an elementary child really do to show his anger but jump up and down and scream?" (P1).

"I don't think the school took it like really ***serious*** then" (P2).

"I just didn't think he took it ***serious***" (P3).

"And then things started escalating because I feel like the consequences weren't strong enough and the girl thought they weren't really ***serious***" (P4).

The next quotation is an illustration of how the term ***ignore*** emerged from a participant's statement even though it was not mentioned directly: "Sometimes they may even see it and act like they don't see it or whatever" (P2).

The above statement led me to wonder if P5's use of the term, ignore, is the reason P2, P3, and P6 made such remarks about the teachers'/schools' reaction to bullying.

I interpreted this next statement by the participant as the school tried to ***ignore*** the parent's concerns regarding the child's victimization: "They tried to camouflage it but they knew what was going on. They try to cover it up, but I brought it out. You're not going to cover this up" (P3).

I also interpreted the next statements as examples of why these participants felt their child's school was not taking their daughters' victimization of bullying seriously:

> "Well, kids are going to be kids." Excuse me? Kids are going to be kids, really? So if my daughter, if I go home and you turn my daughter around and send her back to class and the situation hadn't get fixed and I happen to get ready to wake her up the next morning for school and I go upstairs and see my daughter done hung herself, then what? Kids are going to be kids? (P3)

Some other comments of which I took note led me to interpret them as if the teachers and administrators did not see bullying as a serious problem that needed attention. For instance, P4 said, "Sometimes I feel—well, the first year I felt like the administration really wasn't on board in recognizing that it was a real problem."

In addition, P4 also mentioned:

> I asked for the form.
>
> And they said, 'Well, we don't think you need to fill this form out.'
>
> And I said, 'Well, this has been several instances, it's not just one, two or three. It is daily terrorizing.'

So I said, ‘Why wouldn’t I?’

And then she, the administrator, said, ‘Well, because this will be in her file until she graduates.’

And I said, ‘In my daughter’s?’

And they said, ‘No, in the other young lady’s.’

And I said, ‘Well, I want it simply stated that this occurred so that if anything else happens, we don’t have to go through this process again.’

The word ***ignore*** was used directly by P5:

So if I had a fifth grade class they’ll tell me, okay, those two they run the classroom. So they know, so they have an idea who these kids are, but it’s not like we’re going to enforce it. They’ll tell you just ***ignore*** them or don’t, you know, address it, so. (P5)

When P6 was asked to describe how P6’s son’s school addressed the bullying complaints, P6 responded: “**Ignore** him that he’s the victim. …So he has my father name. So maybe because (they didn’t know that) oh this is the African appearance he or she have, (so they can) ***ignore***.” Here the mother of the victim felt that the school was aware of the bullying, but teachers or administrators ignored complaints because their ethnicity is of African descent, and the son shares P6’s father’s cultural name, which is of her tradition.

P7 did not believe the child’s school was involved with any antibullying policies or programs because teachers or school administrators did not find bullying serious or did not think it exists: “I don’t think so for the simple fact the reason he’s only in

kindergarten, so they feel like, oh, kids will be kids, and kids will pick on each other and do all of that."

"Even if they don't think it's that serious, 'I don't think it's that serious,' as long as I know."

Based on how participants used the words serious or ignore, I interpreted them to mean the schools minimized the victims' situations because they did not recognize bullying as a serious issue in their schools.

Frustrated

All participants used the words ***frustrated, frustration,*** or a phrase or statement similar to these words to describe their feelings during their experience with bullying. The parents painted a picture of what this entailed:

> I've actually had a confrontation with one of the children where, "hey, look, enough is enough. Your parents aren't doing anything, but at this point I will. You're a child to me as well. You may not be mine, but you are a child." (P1)

> Because like I would go talk to the teacher, I spent several days in the office talking to the principal, and then I went to down on (Manakee) and I talked to starting in the superintendent's office, because I felt like the school wasn't attacking the issue and it wasn't getting around, because the case was still like she was still doing it. (P2)

> I went to the next level as like to meet with the mother, to see if the mother can like work with me to like—but the mother was like "oh, my child's not doing this, or whatever, but your child is doing it to my child." (P2)

> I would come and I would start asking different ones in my department, like what did you do if someone was to do this to your child, and it's a kid doing it to a kid, and that's when I figured out yeah this is what bullying is. (P2)

"And that's where my anger and ***frustration*** got involved, because I'm like my daughter's constantly complaining about these kids in the classroom bullying her, and talking about her and throwing stuff at her" (P3).

> He was very ***frustrated*** and when we would have our discussions before she got home, he was like, "Mommy, what else can you do? She can't keep being like this. This is almost at the point where we do need to take her out of the school. (P4)

"Right. And that's when I started, you know, asking my friends on social media for support. Because it was very hard" (P5).

"They said they can't help it. I said, 'I'm going to make police report,' lady said 'okay, great, make police report'" (P6).

"My son is still getting bullied, what are y'all going to do about it? And I'm fed up with it" (P7).

"If I'm not getting my point across, then I'm going to tell him 'yeah, if a child hits you, you hit him back'" (P7).

The above quotations are representations of the participants' frustration with the bullying situation. Because of the lack of support the participants encountered with their child's school, their actions (i.e., P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, and P7) illustrated how they took matters into their hands, due to their frustrations.

Angry

Participants 3 and 6 used the words ***angry*** or ***anger*** to express their feelings about their experiences with school bullying: "And that's where my ***anger*** and frustration got involved" (P3).

"Oh I was so ***angry*** because I am watching (and seeing) all the kids, the bullying, their school mates, I see how it is" (P6).

"I was so ***angry***, I'm telling you, I was so ***angry***" (P6).

Worry

The only participant who used the word *worry* was P6: "I always *worry* about that, I'm telling you."

I recall how I empathized with the participant during this part of the interview, (leaning toward her and repeatedly nodding my head) because as a mother I was able to relate to her concern of anticipating a phone call from the school on a daily basis, especially when the distance between your work and your child's school is far.

Terrified

Only one participant used this word: "Right, yeah and that's why I was ***terrified*** for her at the same time" (P2).

Upset

Participants 2, and 7 described their experiences and feelings regarding school bullying by use of the words ***upset*** or ***upsetting***:

> It was like ***upsetting***, and I don't know it was like I had so many mixed feelings about it, because like it got to the point where she didn't want to go to school and she definitely didn't want to ride the bus. (P2)

"I was ***upset*** because I know my son is more a people person, so he gets along with everybody" (P7).

"So I'm ***upset***, I don't want my son to live in fear" (P7).

Helpless

Another word that participants used to articulate their feelings during their child's victimization of school bullying was ***helpless***: "But I did feel ***helpless***. And I had to put on a face for her so that she wouldn't actually start feeling how I was feeling" (P4).

"You're put in a place of being ***helpless***" (P5).

Although Participant 7 did not use the word directly, I interpreted P7's statement as one that speaks to this notion:

> Because as a parent you don't want to send your kid off into the world every day knowing that something could happen to them or knowing that something is happening to them and there's nothing you can do about it. (P7)

Hard

Two participants used the word ***hard*** as they explained what their experience was like with school bullying:

> I would say my experiences towards bullying, we had a ***hard*** time with her wanting to go to school after it happened. I had a ***hard*** time making her go to school because I felt although I sent her every day I was still nervous that something else was going to still happen, because I didn't feel—at some point the administration can do only but so much. (P4)

"So it's very ***hard*** to take her back. …Because it was very ***hard***" (P5).

Homeschool

Some participants, and even their children, used the words ***homeschool*, *homeschooled*,** or ***homeschooling*** as an alternative way to avoid being bullied by their peers: "I actually thought about ***homeschooling*** her for a little bit so she could get herself together" (P4).

> Because we gave it a few more weeks and we said if it doesn't end we're just going to take her out of school and transfer her to another school or I will have to just take a big hit and ***homeschool*** her. (P4)

"She just started crying uncontrollably. And that's when I realized—and then she started telling me, 'I want to be ***homeschooled***, I don't want to go back'" (P5).

"Because of this bullying he want to come ***homeschool***. Then I told my son, I don't have that money to put you ***homeschool***" (P6).

Problem

Three parents used the word ***problem*** as it relates to bullying: "the administration really wasn't on board in recognizing that it was a real ***problem***" (P4).

"It's a serious ***problem***" (P5).

"I see it as a big ***problem***" (P7).

Consequence

Participants 4, 5, and 7 used the word ***consequence(s)***, or similar phrases, identified through *in vivo* coding at least once. As they explained their interactions with their child's school, or their perspectives on bullying, I interpreted its use to mean that consequences are either in place, or they should be established in the event of a bullying incident. This interpretation was formed based on the notion (from the dialogues) that the

schools did not address the issue of bullying in the most efficient ways the participants would have imagined/expected; hence, the issue continued. It also added to my interpretation that parents believed bullying and consequences should go hand in hand. The following are quotations from some of the participants:

> I'd say when they put some ***consequences*** in place they were maybe smaller ***consequences***, and I had addressed that and said, 'look, this girl's threatening to push her [my daughter] and you're [school administrators] just kind of giving her a slap on the wrist.' (P4)

This participant went on to state,

"And then things started escalating because I feel like the ***consequences*** weren't strong enough and the girl thought that they weren't really serious." (P4)

Here, again, with more detail, the same participant used the word consequence to describe the school's action:

> So then they did I guess it's called—I call it a stay away contract, so basically they had to write up and both of the kids signed that the one that was bullying would not touch, look at or say anything to my daughter. And if she did there was going to be a ***consequence***. So that was another step after that. But I felt like had this stuff been set in place—it was there, but had they utilized these tools earlier we wouldn't have had to get that far. (P4)

Here, P5 applied the word consequences in the quotes below:

> So these kids they may know what the policies are, what behaviors are unacceptable, but there were no ***consequences*** if those behaviors were not followed or the rules weren't enforced. So I think that's where the breakdown comes in. (P5).

"Because they have no guidelines, no ***consequences***, and I think that's what bothers me when I'm at the school" (P5).

"These are the ***consequences***, we developed these strategies together, so the kids know at home and at school, but that's not the way it is" (P5).

"Here's what the rules are, here's what the expectations are, and here are what the ***consequences*** are" (P5).

I interpreted this last quote to mean that the victim noticed his perpetrator was not being reprehended or faced with any *consequences* at school, so he begins to project the bullying behavior in his home. Participant 7 stated,

"Nothing is happening to the child that is doing it to him at school, so he feels like if that can happen then maybe I can get away with it at home" (P7).

Suggestions

None of the participants used this word at any time during their interviews; however, based on their statements, I was able to interpret them as lending their suggestions or solutions that the schools could apply to help address bullying more efficiently. In the individual interviews, five participants proposed that teachers should go beyond teaching just traditional subjects and consider/incorporate social skills in their curriculum that are also useful in everyday life. This change would include teaching emotional behaviors at the students' early age or stages (i.e., kindergarten/elementary

school) of development, and continuing throughout middle school and high school. By this, it may prevent issues such as school bullying and other societal issues leading to imprisonment. Among these suggestions also include the notion that there should be a collective effort made by teachers, parents, and members of the community, to effectively address school bullying. Also, looking closely into the issue at the beginning of a complaint, would guide teachers, administrators, and parents of both the victims and the perpetrators, to identify the needed help. Furthermore, teachers should recognize when a student's disposition differs from his or her usual character, and, they should reach out to the student to understand the change in his/her demeanor. Another suggestion was that there should be more efforts made by schools not to minimize bullying to a lesser problem, but, instead, understand the issue and identify it as such. Parents and teachers should also be on one accord on what steps the schools will take to address the issue/complaint. Last, bringing parents of the victims and the perpetrators together through mediation and parent-teacher conferences may help to address bullying efficiently in schools. Below are the participants' direct suggestions that support the above statements:

> Teachers need to be aware that I think it needs to be something that needs to be put into their career learning, I mean, you know, if I can teach A, B, Cs I need to at least address them. …So I think it needs to be put into their learning as well. (P1)

P1 also mentioned,

"I think we'd have a lot less issues, our prisons would be a lot less full if they were addressed as children and it starts straight in kindergarten. Yeah" (P1).

"And I think if we all work together as parents, as neighbors, as people, our children would be much better because it's getting way out of hand…" (P1)

Another participant suggested,

"The quicker they jump on it the quicker they can also help that student that's bullying" (P4).

P5 also suggested that behavioral learning should be introduced in the early years of development, but she also highlighted some points that schools should consider:

> I feel like it's very important that we address this behavior at an early age. Because we're so afraid of labels. And I think that's what keeps the behavior going and not being addressed appropriately. We have to call it what it is so we can have the proper interventions in place to address those behaviors (P5).

In addition, P5 also mentioned:

> But I think we need systematic standards across the board to really say, "okay, here's what we're going to be doing, parents need to be made aware, these are the consequences, we developed these strategies together, so the kids know at home and at school," but that's not the way it is. (P5)

Participant 6 expressed that teachers should extend their compassion to students when they notice there is a change in behavior pattern:

> The teachers, when they see a kid where this person is always friendly, smiling, they see that person when they come to school is a different attitude, different mind, let them ask that student "what happened to you, what's going on with you?" (P6)

Participant 7 made several comments on how and what teachers and school administrators should apply when dealing with a bullying situation:

"We'll sit down and we'll mediate this situation to try to resolve what's going on, and go on from there. If it keeps on happening then disciplinary actions take place" (P7).

"Like I said, if disciplinary action needs to be taken they'll take them" (P7).

"So the best way to do it is to mediate, because bullying can turn into kids shooting each other, and whatever has been going on right now in this world, so" (P7).

Further, P7 also suggested the following when it comes to how schools should handle/respond to bullying:

> We can sit down with the parent in the classroom or we could have a meeting with all of us and we could resolve what's going on. And me, by me reaching out, they should be able to reach out too—even if they speak to the child, the child tells them "no," kids lie nowadays or kids will tell you anything. (P7)

Here, P7 implied that schools should also teach social skills and not just the basic subjects:

> Because besides math and English and all the other languages you gotta learn in life, you have to be social in life, you have to know how to get along with people. Especially in my line of work, I work for Department of Health and Human Services, so I'm the xxxx, I have to be able to know how to deal with people's emotions and their different feelings and everything like that, so. (P7)

As with P1 and P5, P7 suggested that schools should take preventive/proactive measures as early as possibly, in a child's learning stages:

> If you don't start from now, when they get older they're going to be going out there and doing stuff that they don't need to, especially kids that are getting bullied. And like I said, they learn from young, you gotta start from young because if you don't when they get older it won't be like that. (P7)

Again, the above quotations alluded to what participants believed schools should do in order to prevent bullying or how to address the issue better.

Follow up

Four participants used the words ***follow up,*** or with such a context through their statements, to describe how the schools failed to respond to their complaints. The following quotations were taken from the transcript of some of the parents:

"There was no phone calls afterwards" (P1).

"It was just left open" (P1).

"I had to keep going back to them, asking them well what's the case, what's the issue, because she did this" (P2).

> I'll be honest, sometimes they did not get back to me and give me feedback, which was really concerning because I felt like if you're pulling her down and the other student down, that the parent should have some information. Either yes, we found this, or no we didn't find that, or some type of communication. (P4)

"So I don't think there was really a good ***follow-up*** also" (P4).

"But she did mention to me that she was going to talk to this child's teacher. And I did not get a ***follow up*** from her" (P5).

"Well they have yet to call me back, and that was about two, three weeks ago. So they have yet to call me back and set up a meeting" (P5).

"And they assured me that they would take some actions and ***follow up***, and they haven't ***followed up*** yet" (P5).

"The administrators did not ***follow up*** with me or contact me, they told me they would but they never did" (P5).

Never/Ever

Most participants used they words ***never*** or ***ever*** interchangeably to also describe the school's failed attempts to address their bullying concerns. The following quotations reflect what the participants said: "I'm not even quite sure if it ***ever*** happened" (P1).

"Nothing was ***ever*** addressed after that, towards me anyway, it ***never*** was brought to my attention ***ever*** again" (P1).

> So they didn't call me that day. The next day I still hadn't heard from them, so it took me like two days before I called the principal and I was like, "you ***never*** did get back to me." I wanted to know what the outcome was. (P2)

"And it ***never*** got handled until I came into the school" (P3).

"They told me they would but they ***never*** did" (P5).

"I don't know if she spoke with the other kid's teacher. We've ***never*** revisited that" (P5).

"You people know, but you ***never*** ask my son what happened."

Blame/Fault

One parent who did not use these words directly stated,

> So, you know, to be honest with you, the school almost tried to make it seem like my daughter was almost now a problem child. But nowadays, again, it's being, "Are you sure you didn't cause the problem?" You know, so they're like, "I can't go to her either." (P1).
>
> The other parent was more direct:
>
> But since my son didn't know how to express himself, they always cast the ***blame*** on him, that he's the one that is what they call the victim, everything, they always giving me the ***blame*** because he do not know how to express himself. (P6)
>
> "They always they make it his ***fault***, he's the one at ***fault***" (P6).

Hurt/Painful

Three parents used the words ***hurt*** or ***painful*** to express how they felt about their experience with child's victimization: "But as far as the actual bullying and what was being done, I was ***hurt***" (P1).

"It ***hurt*** me. And I cried, because I understood what they were going through" (P3).

"It's too ***painful*** I'm so stressful for that because for the past two years, they have been bullying my son in xxxx elementary school, they been bullying my son" (P6).

Constantly/Repeatedly

Two participants used the words ***constantly*** or ***repeatedly*** to describe the frequency of their child's victimization: "Because it ***constantly*** kept happening in the same classroom. She was ***constantly*** coming home crying about the same situation and asking her, 'what is the teacher doing?'" (P3).

"I'm like my daughter's ***constantly*** complaining about these kids in the classroom bullying her, and talking about her and throwing stuff at her" (P3).

"It's because of these students ***constantly*** harassing her and bothering her" (P3).

"And if he's coming to me ***repeatedly*** with the same problem, then obviously there is a problem" (P7).

Paper/File/Form/E-mail

Five participants used ***paper, file, form,*** or ***e-mail,*** depending on their description of the steps or approaches they took to make the school aware of their child's bullying incidents. The quotations below illustrate their actions: "And then again had to ***file*** the ***papers*** through Montgomery County" (P1).

"I almost got the feel [ing] from the principal that because he has to now ***file*** this **paperwork** that I filled out to Montgomery County, this is almost like a nick on his school now" (P1).

"I had a ***paper*** trail" (P3).

"I asked for the ***form***" (P4).

"Usually I had to ***e-mail*** and call after, because I would know, my daughter would say 'oh they pulled me down in the office to find out what happened,' and I just wasn't feeling so supported" (P4).

"Right, and I don't think at the end of the day they didn't want to do that paper work, because that ***paper***—I mean that's the ***paper*** trail now, they have to contact both parents, that has to be filed in their ***file***, and they have to monitor the situation" (P4).

"When the administrator didn't get back to me then I would copy that, attach that ***e-mail*** and then CC the principal if need be" (P4).

"Because of bully, yes, so the doctor she's the one that give me this ***form***, I fill out this ***form***" (P6).

"Bully ***form***, yes, that's a bully ***form***, when it happened, all the people names, I put all the names that he give me or the sister, them I put in the ***paper***. Then have the ***paper*** and I have the copy and make the copy" (P6).

"I ***e-mailed*** her, she said she'll find out what's going on and e-mail me back" (P7).

"So then of course that's when—the first time is when I ***e-mailed*** the teacher, the second time was when I ***e-mailed*** her again, I'm like, 'Who is outside at recess?'" (P7).

The above quotes showed exactly how participants reached out to their child's school or teacher, to notify them of the bullying incident.

Description of Observations and Memos

The following descriptions of the individual interviews provide understanding of some of the nuances captured during the data collection process.

Individual Interviews

P1. I met with P1 in front of a local public library, but P1 preferred that we sit in her car. It was around 2:30 in the afternoon on a Sunday. She had informed me in advance that she would not be able to be interviewed for more than 45 minutes, as her toddler was home with her boyfriend and that her schedule was tight. She was eager to start the interview and even started to show me the documents she filed to make a formal

complaint about her child's bullying with Montgomery County School Board of Education.

Although she had already signed the informed consent form, I asked her if she had any questions about the form to make sure she was clear about her rights and what the study entailed. She did not share any concerns regarding the study or her participation in the study. During the interview, I noted she was very open about her experience and although she was not satisfied with how the school handled her daughter's bullying incidents, her demeanor was calm and relaxed as she talked. She made abundant eye contact, which made me believe she was comfortable talking with me. In my field notes, I noted she mentioned she too was bullied as a child. She stated,

> "Because as a child I went through it too. Not necessarily the extreme of it nowadays, it was more of the pulling of the hair or the name calling and things like that. So I took it I was very passionate about it."

I wondered if her victimization as a child might be the driving force to try to address the issue of her daughter's victimization. However, her motivation was unclear to me when she initially ignored her daughter's bullying. She mentioned,

> "I went through it, I came out okay. I'm not walking around with this chip on my shoulder because somebody pulled my hair or whatever, you know. I did let it slide for about I'm going to say the entire summer I allowed it to just go on and just to see where her mind was, what it was she was—my daughter, she's just too loving."

I thought maybe she was in denial or was not ready to face the situation, as her voice was a little shaken by her reminiscence of her childhood bullying experience. She later said,

"I felt like the one thing that disturbed me that I even thought was she'll be okay." After this comment, I noted that her body posture showed signs of remorse. This participant's child's victimization took place in elementary school, where she is currently attending.

P2. I met P2 at her home and we sat on a couch in her living room. The interview was at 4:15 p.m. on a weekday. Participant 2's daughter was a victim of bullying in elementary school, but she is now a high school student. Knowing this, I wondered if the fact that the victimization was of the past is what contributed to the participant's openness and expansiveness in speaking with me. In other words, I wondered if it made our dialogue easier and more fluid for the participant. As in the case of P1, she was calm while explaining her experiences and made very good eye contact. She talked about how her emotional effects prompted her to take action. She said,

> "I felt bad for her because then I was like it's my job as a parent, I have to get it straight. So that's why I took the approach of going into like try to address it with the school to see make sure that the school is doing their job with it."

I made a note to myself that the parent seemed to be experiencing similar emotional stress as her child and therefore felt the need to protect her child from any further bullying.

Participant 2 made it clear that the school did not handle her daughter's victimization appropriately, as the bullying stopped after the bully/perpetrator left the school. She stated, "I was just glad when the girl, the parent moved so when they moved away that meant that we didn't have to deal with that anymore. I don't even know where the little girl's at now." Following the interview, I immediately included in my memo

writing that this factor might also influence the participant's perception of her child's school when it comes to bullying.

P3. Participant 3 contrasted with P1 and P2 in that she appeared to be on edge and was expressive. She made intense eye contact throughout the interview. Based on her tone of voice and how she crossed her hands, she seemed very angry about her daughter's victimization, even though it occurred when her daughter was in elementary school, and is currently a high school student. I noted that because of her level of emotion, I was a little uncomfortable, but I understood the cause of her anger. Like P1, P3 was also bullied as a youth. She said, "I was bullied. I was a victim of bullying. My whole elementary school year, until I got in middle school, that's when it stopped." In my note I wondered if that was what contributed to her anger about her daughter's victimization. As the interview progressed, I later learned that her daughter, who is now 16 years old and will soon turn 17, is still impacted by her victimization. She said,

> "And it still has affected her, because now she has been acting out. She's 16, she'll be 17 in February. She has acted out so bad now that it has caused chaos at home. She's been acting—at one point was acting out at home and I had to send her to—CPS have came to my house. I have had to send her to Potomac Ridge for a couple of weeks. It has gotten out of hand due to her being bullied."

She further explained the ongoing effects of her daughter's victimization. She mentioned,

> "It has changed her and now she's always in an attack mode. As soon as someone says something she just like ready to pounce immediately. And I'm like, "calm down, it's not that serious. No one's attacking you." So if someone—if she feels

> like someone is being aggressive with her immediately she goes from zero to a hundred within seconds."

In my notes, I noted the mother's lingering anger may result from how her daughter's victimization has caused tension in her home and in turn has put a strain on their family's dynamics, well after the bullying happened. I also noted that her anger could have been from the school principal's reaction to her daughter's victimization after she said,

> "Honestly, me personally, I felt like the principal was prejudiced because he was always for the other student, but not the certain ones. He just gave me—and I wasn't the only one that felt that way, some of the staff was—I felt like he was—he showed more favoritism towards the Caucasian children and the Asian kids and things like that."

Yet I still wondered if her anger also came from fear of losing her daughter to suicide. She said, "It even got to the point that my daughter was writing suicidal letters. And that's where I drew the line." With further reflection, these responses seemed to have indicated some degree of dissatisfaction with how the school handled bullying or her perspective about the school administrators at her child's school.

P4. Participant 4 was soft spoken and relaxed. She too made abundant eye contact and was open in her expression. Although she did not mentioned that she was a victim of bullying during her youth, she defined bullying:

> "My definition of bullying was a student constantly picking on another student, and sometimes bringing in other students to make that student feel less than, to feel nervous, and almost to the point where they are just scared to be at school."

I noted to myself that she seemed very aware of what bullying looked like and was able to recognize it in her daughter. I wondered if her definition was solely from her daughter's experience or if she was somewhat informed or knowledgeable about the topic as well. She also stated,

> "The only thing that has changed since my daughter was bullied is that there was a technology piece to it. And so I had never thought about that, but my daughter had received text messages from the student saying that she was going to hurt her at school, and that was something new to us."

I made a note to myself that this part of her experience was an indicator to the mother of how bullying has progressed. The participant expressed that the school responded to the threatening text messages better than with the physical and verbal attacks her daughter experienced, based on the following statement: "And I didn't even have to produce them. I'm not sure how they got a hold of them, but immediately they—she [the bully] got sent home for that." I wondered if the school responded to this type of bullying because it was more visible and the evidence was easily seen. As with P3's daughter, bullying impacted P4's daughter after it stopped. She said,

> "So I am very hopeful that things have stopped. But she's not afraid to talk about it anymore, and she isn't afraid to talk about her opinion, her feelings about the issue. But I will say, you know, she's had to go to outside counseling sessions because of this. We needed to at least get her through the beginning part of the high school experience. Because it took a toll."

Unlike the previous participants, the bullying of this participant's child occurred in middle school and continued until the early semester of high school.

P5. Participant 5 was not only a parent, but was also a registered substitute teacher at the time but was not employed as a teacher during the interview. However, she was able to lend both perspectives as a parent who experienced her child being a victim of bullying, and also as a teacher who knew how the school system generally operated when it came to bullying in the schools where she taught.

The participant seemed to be very relaxed and was fully informed about the topic. She was the most insightful/detailed of the participants. She made substantial eye contact and was expansive in sharing her experience. I noted that this might have been so because she was fortunate to witness bullying from two different angles. However, for the purpose of this study, I tried to focus my notes on her feelings and experiences as a parent, not as a teacher. This participant was also a parent who identified herself as a victim of school bullying in her youth. She mentioned, "So I really identified with her on that, because a lot of times I was picked on but I was also one to react get away from me, and then that's what they see. So then you're being aggressive." I noted that when P6, in particular, mentioned that her son was being *blamed* or was *faulted* for his victimization, it was due to him retaliating and hitting his bully after numerous attacks. It was clear that this parent did not want her daughter to be accused of being aggressive or being blamed for her victimization. She said, "And so I didn't want to encourage her to kick at this kid." She also mentioned, "I mean my husband taught her some skills to defend herself physically which I don't advocate for, especially in the school setting." I interpreted this to mean not only was this parent trying to protect her daughter from being bullied, but also from the political aspects of the school system as well. The victimization of this parent's child occurred at her current elementary school.

P6. Participant 6 seemed very upset/angry during the interview. Although she had a very thick accent, her tone indicated the frustration and anger she felt due to her son's victimization. Again, I felt uncomfortable every time she raised her voice as she talked. Like P3, P6 made intense eye contact. She was very expressive. She explained that her son's school was unresponsive to his victimization until his psychiatrist suggested she complete the bullying form and submit it to the school. "Yes, yes, because of the psychiatry doctor give me paper, fill the form, then she put her complimentary card for them to call her." According this participant, the psychiatrist became involved after her son threatened to commit suicide. She stated, "Three or four months ago, three months ago, in the classroom (other kids) is bullying my son, my son said I'm going to commit suicide." Because of the other participants only P3 expressed so much anger, I noted that this participant's anger also relates to fear of losing her son to suicide. She, like the other participants, expressed dissatisfaction with how her son's school responded to his victimization and stated, " I'm not happy about that because the other time I talk to them they would say 'oh we are trying about that, we can't—it's out of the school, we can't handle it.'" This caused me to reflect again on the fact that some parents felt that the school didn't see bullying to be as *serious* or they *ignored* the complaints. I also wondered if some school personnel believed their influence or control over how students behaved outside school grounds was limited. The participant was upset to hear a school official tell her that the bullying was beyond the school premises and replied, "I said well it's inside the school bus." She attempted to justify why the school should take action to resolve the bullying. The child of this participant's victimization took place in his current elementary school.

P7. Participant 7 did not make as much eye contact as other participants. I wondered if this was due to his age (the youngest parent of the group). He appeared to be nervous at the beginning of the interview, but was more relaxed as the interview continued. Although he maintained minimal eye contact, he was open and frequently looked at me while I was taking notes. I felt rushed during the interview as he was on his lunch break, and I wanted to remain within the agreed time frame. He mentioned he was also bullied as a child: "Well, I was bullied when I was younger. I've gotten bullied like throughout my middle school, high school a little bit, and yeah that's all I really remember." His initial statement about his experience with bullying was, "Well, as far as him being bullied, when he first told me I was upset because I know my son is more a people person, so he gets along with everybody." He added that he was shocked and wanted to know who was bullying his son.

His primary focus seemed to be on the school's inability to resolve the bullying issue: "She told me she didn't hear anything about xxxx getting bullied." He, like the other participants, felt the issue was not being addressed adequately and made suggestions to his son's teacher. He said, "And I've told the teacher before, I was like, 'We can sit down with the parent in the classroom or we could have a meeting with all of us and we could resolve what's going on.'" He also rhetorically stated, "I'm trying to figure out whenever there's a situation at school isn't the teacher supposed to call the parent and let him know what's going on and let him know oh, xxxx got in an altercation, whatever, whatever."

The participant seemed to be frustrated about why the school was not informing him that something was going on at school, even if it was not bullying per se, providing

at least an incident report of whenever an unusual situation occurred. Due to his ongoing frustration with how the school was handling his son's bullying incidents, he decided to remove his son from the school and enroll him to a new elementary school. He stated, "Like just because all this bullying situation, and I have my own reasons, but just because of this bullying situation two weeks ago I changed my son's school. He goes to the school right here above my job now."

In sum, audiotaping and taking field notes while interviewing participants was a very useful method I applied in collecting information that resulted in the rich descriptive data captured in all the transcripts. During this process, observation played a key role in data collection. I made note of participants' facial expressions and gestures as they talked and tried to understand the emotional component of what they were describing. In addition, I documented participants' recall of their childhood experiences of also being victims of bullying and asked followed up questions based on their reminiscent tone and looks of frustration. Immediately following the interviews, I used memo writing to capture my impressions about participants' emotions that were evoked as they talked about their experience with school bullying and other aspects of their experience. Included in my memos were observations about the environment in which the interview was conducted, and the participants' demeanors. These observations added value to the qualitative depth of the empirical data I collected. As Glaser asserted, it is all data (2001, as cited in Maxwell, 2013).

As a result of the individual interviews and analyzing the data, themes were generated to make sense of the phenomena at hand. In generating themes, the categories themselves emerged at different conceptual levels; for example, the general themes,

which are also the core or main categories, are highest, the subcategories, which are more specific themes, are next, and the remaining categories cohesively pull the themes together. Creswell (2013) described these categories as a different level of abstraction, with the top categories being the most abstract information and the categories at the bottom representing the least abstract themes, where information is derived from multiple sources. Figure 1 illustrates this point further, showing the hierarchical/abstraction levels and relationship of the categories in generating the themes.

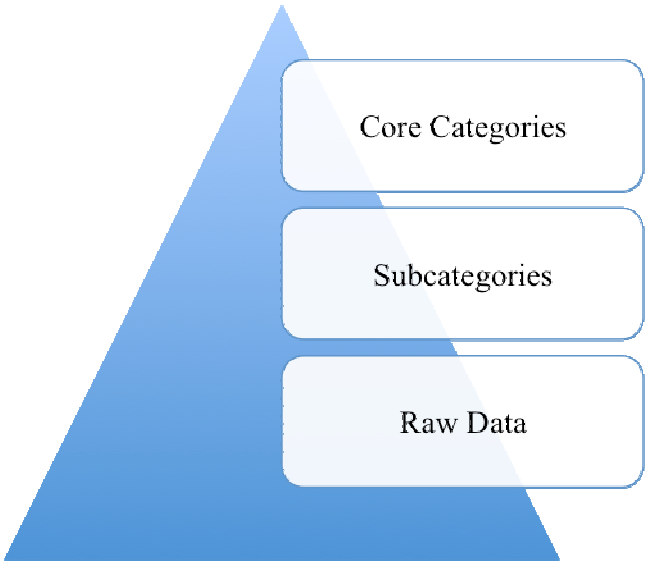

Figure 1. Levels of abstraction in category generation.

Reviewing the data repeatedly was a key part of the coding process. During my review, I identified keywords and concepts that I interpreted as relating to the keywords, based on the frequency with which participants used these words, and the meanings they ascribed to them. I relied on *in vivo* codes to preserve participants' original perspectives in the context of the statement. To generate categories from the data, I went through the data several times and highlighted, circled, or underlined phrases and sentences that came

before and after the keywords. In general, this helped me identify the properties that related to them. During this time, I constantly compared the properties to what participants said before and after, and to what was said by other participants. As a result, the general themes emerged. Figure 2 illustrates this process.

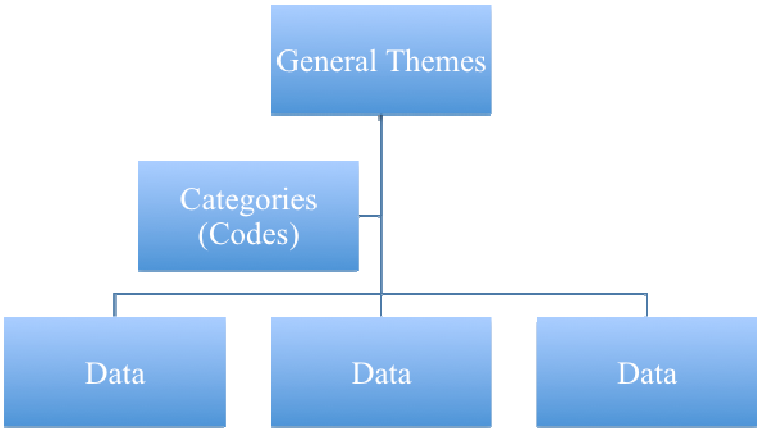

Figure 2. Theme generation.

According to Creswell's (2013) and Moustakas's (1994), modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, the second major phase of coding or analysis meant I had to decide which of the initial codes from the list of significant statements/keywords would fit best into a category that would support a larger theme. I found myself frequently returning to the data as I gained new insights about a piece of data I had previously overlooked. This provided me with new interpretations about the data. In short, participants' words, nuances, and nonverbal cues captured in my notes helped elucidate the following interpretations that emerged from the data.

I interpreted and combined the keywords ***anything/nothing, never/ever, constantly/repeatedly, serious/ignore, blame/fault, continued, worse,*** and ***follow up*** to

represent not only the schools' response to participants' complaints or concerns about their child's victimization of school bullying, but also participants' understanding of *how* the experience happened (structural description). Therefore, I labeled them into the core category/general theme (i.e., meaning units): **Unresolved**.

Participants' descriptions of their experiences with school bullying led to a discovery of their emotions. Therefore, I grouped the keywords ***hurt/painful***, ***bad***, ***frustrated***, ***angry***, ***worry***, ***terrified***, ***upset***, and ***helpless*** into this general theme: **Feelings**. I interpreted the keywords ***homeschool***, ***sternness*** and ***paper/file/form/e-mail*** to mean the participants' ultimate way of handling the issue. Thus, I created **Action** as the general theme. I interpreted the keyword ***problem*** as the meaning participants' ascribed to school bullying. Therefore, I developed the general theme: **Definition**.

The participants' overall description of *what* they experienced (textural description) in regard to school bullying showed as a process or phase through which they formed their opinion or subjective meaning. Therefore, I grouped the keywords ***negative*** and ***hard*** into this general theme: **Experience**.

The keyword ***consequence*** and the term ***suggestions,*** which emerged as a code based on their context***,*** were interpreted as participants' solution to minimize or eliminate bullying in schools. Although participants did not directly use the word ***suggestions***, I interpreted their statements to mean that they gave their input on how schools can better address bullying. Therefore, I created a general theme: **Strategy**.

When grouped and combined into the specific categories described above, the keywords and concepts that emerged and later resulted as the general themes (i.e., core categories) painted a clearer picture of parents' experience of school bullying. With a

representation of the total frequency for each grouped/combined categories, Table 5 depicts the areas parents emphasized most from their experiences. Figure 3 shows the total frequency of the general themes.

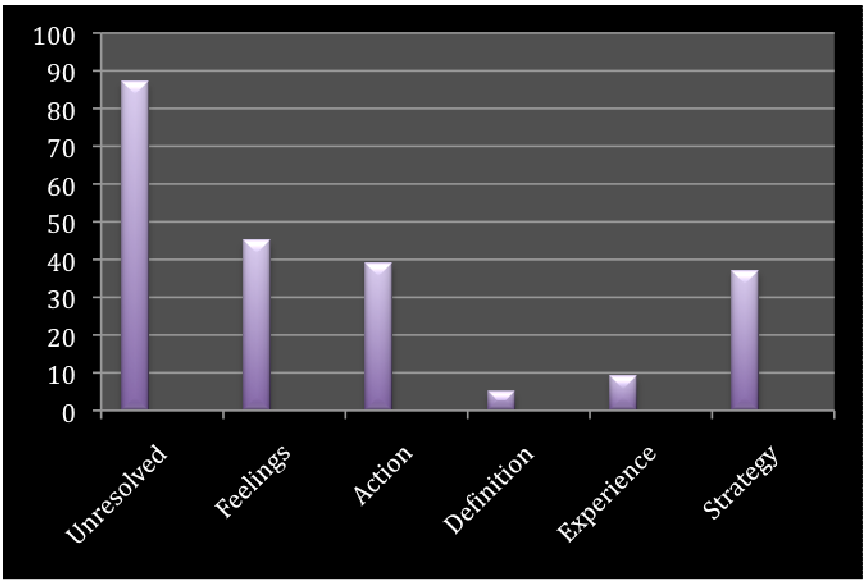

Figure 3. Frequency of general themes.

As seen in Figure 3, parents of a child victimized by school bullying in this study used keywords, terms, phrases, and concepts that generated general themes that were interpreted as (a) Unresolved = 87, (b) Feelings = 45, (c) Action = 39, (d) Definition = 5, (e) Experience = 9, and (f) Strategy = 37. The numbers of each general theme indicate where parents' attention was focused most and how they interpreted/viewed their experience. I interpreted their experiences to mean that a majority of parents, if not all, felt strongly that their bullying issue was *unresolved*. They openly talked about their *feelings*, the *actions* they took, the *strategies* they believe might eliminate bullying, their interpretation of their *experience*, and how they *defined* bullying.

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of bullying for parents whose children have been victimized by school bullying in Montgomery County and Prince Georges County, Maryland. Figure 4 illustrates the process of coding that resulted in six main interrelated core categories, also referenced as general themes.

Figure 4. General themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness (Quality)

This qualitative phenomenological doctoral study explored the meaning of school bullying of parents whose children were victims of bullying. To complete a trustworthy research study, I took several steps to make certain the study is of good quality. The first step to ensure a sound study was to obtain permission from Walden University's IRB to begin data collection. Next, I applied a purposeful sample of seven participants for the study. Upon receiving participants' signed consent forms agreeing to participate in the study, I used a Researcher's General Interview Guide/Protocol for data collection in the form of individual face-to-face interviews. Next, I recorded interviews using a digital

audio/voice recorder and a professional transcriptionist later transcribed each interview. After the transcripts were returned, I read them and listened to the recordings while reading the transcripts to ensure there were no mistakes in the transcript. I also provided each participant with their transcript for review (member checking), so that accuracy could be ensured. This process of member checking is vital to the study as it establishes validity and trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Creswell 2009, 2013).

Another step I took to establish validity and trustworthiness was to include in my memo writing (notes) a description of my personal experiences of what I saw or observed in each interview. Again this method, referenced as *epoche,* helped me put aside my biases and beliefs about the phenomenon and focus on what was in front of me—the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Next, once participants' informed me that they had reviewed their transcripts and agreed that what was transcribed was accurate, I began to analyze and hand-code the data. Following my analysis, I wrote a descriptive summary of what was said by participants, aligned with my observations.

Results

As mentioned previously, I presented the data as it was coded, the categories and concepts that emerged from the different levels of coding, memoing, and the resulting themes. This section further describes how I interpreted and synthesized these categories to generate the general themes that answered the main research question as well as the four subquestions. I present the findings here through the stories of parents' experiences. Each question is listed and includes the general themes.

Main Research Question

The main research question stated, How do parents whose children experienced school bullying perceive school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family's dynamics? Themes generated from this question explored how parents experienced school bullying and the meanings they ascribed to their experiences. The parents specifically identified the schools' having a casual attitude about bullying in many aspects including antibullying policies. Parents also explained that their home environment was impacted. The themes that supported this include experience, unresolved, feelings, action, definition, and strategy.

Experience. "A very, very much so negative" (P1).

"I think to be honest with you that was a very negative experience" (P5).

Unresolved. "So I think they're blinded by it or in denial" (P1).

"I don't think the school took it like really serious then" (P2).

"I just didn't think he took it serious" (P3).

"So I don't think there was really a good follow-up. … The perspective from her was that this is not an academic class, so it's not as structured. … Regardless, she's getting a grade for it, and her learning is being disrupted. … And she has the right to access an education just like every other student" (P4).

"And it bothers me when educators and parents undermine what children need to be learning. … So they have an idea who these kids are, but it's not like we're going to enforce it. … The administrators did not follow up with me or contact me. … I feel as though the policies are so lax within the schools" (P5).

"Yes, and they never say nothing, don't make no action, no nothing" (P6).

"Because of this bullying situation two weeks ago I changed my son's school" (P7).

Feelings. "Like mood swings. … They just started lashing out at home, and the attitudes, and fussing and fighting with each other over little minor things. … 'I was there for you. Don't lash out at me. Don't disrespect me'" (P3).

"He was very frustrated and when we would have our discussions before she got home, he was like, "Mommy, what else can you do? She can't keep being like this. … This is almost at the point where we do need to take her out of the school." … So at times she was becoming cranky with her brother" (P4).

"Because he will get angry and he will push my daughter. … When they bully him in school, my daughter will pay that price that day. … If I'm not home, my auntie cannot handle my son. … My auntie was scared. … Then my auntie's asking him what happened, "they say I'm too fat," he start screaming, yelling. … He just banged the door" (P6).

Action. "I've actually had a confrontation with one of the children [bullies]" (P1).

"I went to the next level as like to meet with the mother, to see if the mother can like work with me" (P2).

"I was basically very stern with the student [bully]" (P3).

"We said if it doesn't end we're just going to take her out of school and transfer her to another school or I will have to just take a big hit and homeschool her" (P4).

"So I went to school that day and I asked, I said 'is everything being taken care of?'" (P5).

"I'm going to make a police report. … So I was in the police station" (P6).

"I e-mailed her" (P7).

Definition. "It is a problem. And I think if it's left unresolved it's going to be a problem" (P5).

"I see it as a big problem" (P7).

Strategy.

"So I think it should be put into their learning as well. … So, in the process of that, maybe you should—maybe there should be something in the curriculum where they know the sights, what are the red flags, you know, not just the principal, not just the counselor, they shouldn't be the only ones trained for this" (P1).

"The quicker they jump on it the quicker they can also help that student that's bullying" (P4).

"But I think we have to focus on implementing school-wide policies. … But I think we need systematic standards across the board. … So we have to start really addressing the issue and calling it what it is. … have systematic policies where teachers are going to be involved in coming up with the criterion for what constitutes bullying, coming up with the consequences. … So I think as educators there has to be more uniformity in terms of how are we going to address these issues? … Because a lot of schools have anti-bullying the signs are everywhere

> and the nice posters are there. But if you don't have consequences for when those rules are broken, then it's a problem. … They weren't enforcing" (P5).

"The teachers…let them ask that student 'what happened to you, what's going on with you?'" (P6).

> "Because besides math and English and all the other languages you gotta learn in life, you have to be social in life, you have to know how to get along with people. … When I was in high school if there was a problem we'll mediate it, we'll get to the bottom of it. … So the best way to do it is to mediate, because bullying can turn into kids shooting each other, and whatever has been going on right now in this world, so" (P7).

Subquestion 1

Subquestion 1 asked, How did parents initially experience the victimization of their child from school bullying? All seven participants described their *initial* experience with their child's victimization differently, but they all arrived at the same understanding and meaning of how they experience bullying and what happened as they experienced bullying. They offered specific examples that depicted their experience as parents. Several factors triggered the parents' desire to keep their children from further victimization. The responses indicated that parents whose children are victimized by school bullying begin to witness signs of bullying in their initial experience with the issue. The theme related to their experiences is: Experience.

Experience.

> "But then when I start seeing the things that you start noticing in your kids that you never noticed before, you know, she'd be sitting on the curb and she's like this with her head in her hands, or she's crying, but she used to sit in the middle of parallel parked cars, she'd sit on the curb, and she'd cry there so no one could see her. No one. And so by me checking on her and looking outside" (P1).

The above quotation described what the *experience* was like for P1 as she realized that something was bothering her child. This next quotation also lends insight on how the participant initially experienced her child's victimization of bullying:

> "Like because she didn't want to go to school, and when I would pick her up from daycare it was like she was hungry, and I was like "what is wrong with your diet"—and she would just be "well, can I get this," and especially if I was to take her to McDonald's or Wendy's or somewhere, it seemed like she was ordering and I was like "this is just a snack, this isn't dinner." … Yeah, it was never nothing like exciting. She was so dry and everything. … And then that's when she was crying and she was saying what had happened on the bus, what the little girl had did to her" (P2).

Here is another quotation regarding the participant's understanding of what she experienced as a parent of a child who was a victim of bullying:

> "She was constantly coming home crying about the same situation. … Tears, crying when they're coming home and not wanting to eat. … So they passing up dinner, passing up dessert, I just want to go to bed, I just want to go to sleep, or

faking sickness in the morning because they don't want to go to school, or, "Mommy, can you take me to school, I don't feel like riding the bus." You know, it was signs, heavy signs. And I automatically knew" (P3).

Another participant described what she experienced as:

"She started crying a lot. … And her appetite changed, she wasn't eating as much. She just was looking really sad. She was very sad. … And also she didn't want to stay after school. … She didn't want to go to games. … She did not want to go to the little dances. … Every morning she'd wake up, "I don't want to go to school." … She was very clingy to me. … And it became on a daily basis. And then she started being really quiet, more withdrawn. And she's like my pretty outgoing kid at home" (P4).

Participant 5 referenced her experience as:

"I think for her she's a very outgoing kid, very talkative, and she literally shut down and just would not talk, kind of dragging herself, going to school in the morning wasn't very excited. … She just started crying uncontrollably. … I canceled everything for the next day and say "no, we're going to handle this." And the next morning she got up at six o'clock, started crying. "My stomach hurts, I don't want to go to school." So she had physical symptoms from the experiences" (P5).

Here, the participant explained her initial experience as the child informing her of his encounters with his peers:

> "Because when he come from school (he hurry) makes reports to me, every day, he make a report to me that he bully him. … He told me that when you go inside the school bus, the (daycare) kids, they (see) calling names" (P6).

This last quotation was interpreted as the participant's experience as well:

> "Or one day he came home, he just didn't want to talk" (P7).

The above quotations from the participants shed light on how they experienced their child's victimization by school bullying. For example, the majority of participants in this study described their initial experiences as seeing a change in their child's behavior. This change of behavior includes: frequent crying, not wanting to talk, loss of appetite, and lack the desire to attend school. More so, this indicated how parents became aware of their child's victimization. Furthermore, participants' experiences also allowed me to understand that their children were not the only ones faced with their victimization; the parents also endured (indirectly) some aspect of their child's victimization as well. The next subquestion examined the approach parents took to report their children's victimization.

Subquestion 2

Subquestion 2 was, How do parents of a child victimized by school bullying go about reporting their child's victimization? Numerous examples emerged of how participants informed their child's school of the victimization. Each of the seven participants described attempts to contact their child's school to address their bullying incidents. Based on the responses, it appeared that overall, participants used whichever means (i.e., meeting, face-to-face, e-mail, form, phone, etc.) was available or convenient

to communicate or contact their child's school to report bullying. The identified theme here is: Action.

Here are some of the actions these parents took to bring attention to their child's victimization.

Action.

"We kind of tried to address the actual student himself and kind of get a meeting with the parent, and it just kind of went on. So then we I actually took it to the school's attention and was told that, you know, they would have the discussion with the child and his parent or whatever. … I filed with Montgomery County" (P1).

The next participant also described the steps taken to try to rectify her child's victimization:

"Okay, I first started with her school, the school teacher. And I addressed it with her to see if she can like pay attention to the kids, and if she anything then she can take that step to come in between the kids to make sure nothing else takes place or whatever. … I spent several days in the office talking to the principal, and then I went to down on (Manakee) and I talked to starting in the superintendent's office" (P2).

Here, again, this participant expressed the efforts she made to advocate on behalf of her child's victimization:

> "I came into the school. … We went into the counseling room and sat down with the student and then my child. It was basically a conference. … I would try to reach out to the counselors. I try to reach out to the principal" (P3).

Another example of the type of actions parents took to resolve their child's victimization by school bullying is described below by P4: "First I called the school because I wanted to talk with someone. And then I followed it up with an e-mail. … I asked for the form" (P4).

Following, P5 explained the actions she took as such:

> "The first thing I did was I went to her teacher. … And again I went back to the teacher because again it's a different situation now. … I hadn't heard back from her. … I really feel like I wanted to give the teacher an opportunity to really address the issue and not run to the principal's office. … So I called the office and I spoke with the admin secretary" (P5).

Further, the participant here explained the extent she went to try and seek help for her child's victimization:

> "I call the school, I said please I'm begging you guys, if you guys don't mind to put my son and my daughter on the same bus. I said this is too much, they keep on bullying my son. … I'm going to make police report. … They told me that I should talk again to they can't just make a police report like that. … Because of bully, yes, so the doctor she's the one that give me this form, I fill out this form" (P6).

This final quotation also explains how the parent went about reporting the child's victimization: "So I talked to the school and then when I talked to the teacher, I e-mailed her." (P7).

The quotations mentioned above illustrated parents' initial reactions to their child's victimization. All of the participants made several attempts to inform school personnel of the bullying incidents their children have experienced. The next subquestion captured the emotions of parents whose children have been victimized by school bullying.

Subquestion 3

Subquestion 3 read, What are the feelings of parents of a victimized child of school bullying, after learning of their child's victimization? All seven participants noted their emotions as they experienced school bullying. All participants identified how they felt during their child's victimization of school bullying. The findings in this area could support the notion that although parents may not have to deal with direct bullying with their child, they too undergo emotional challenges that are similar to ones of their victimized child. Specifically, findings indicated that parents of children who are victimized by school bullying suffer from an emotional impact. The ascribed theme for this category is: Feelings.

The following quotations lend insight to the feelings parents attached to their experience of having a child who has been a victim of school bullying.

Feelings. "I was hurt. I felt bad for her" (P1).

"I was terrified. … I felt bad for her. … It was like upsetting. … I had so many mixed feelings. … I'm so disgusted" (P2).

"My anger and frustration got involved. … It hurt me" (P3).

"I felt—it was hard. … And I felt bad for her. … I felt terrible for her. … But I did feel helpless" (P4).

"So for me it was a lot of feelings because you feel bad. … Being helpless. … I had very complex feelings. … It was very traumatic for both of us" (P5).

"It's too painful. … I'm so stressed. … I was so angry. … I always worry about that" (P6).

"I was upset. … I was devastated. … So it's like it's stressful. … I was shocked" (P7).

Participants here openly expressed the feelings that evoked after being aware of their child's victimization. The fourth subquestion of this study explored the responses or feedback parents received from their child's school after learning about their child's victimization.

Subquestion 4

Subquestion 4 was, What types of responses, advocacy, or support do parents of a victimized child of school bullying receive when reporting their child's victimization? All seven participants provided insight and identified examples of how their child's school reacted to their concerns and complaints of school bullying. The responses indicated that the schools did not respond adequately to issues regarding bullying in the most efficient manner. Based on parents' responses, the identifiable theme is: Unresolved.

The following quotations are examples of the responses some teachers and school administrators provided parents once the parents brought the bullying incidents to the schools' attention.

Unresolved.

> The response was of nothing. The response, again, was "we'll do this, we'll try to speak to them," you know. The principal, he kind of wanted to say, you know, "I know who you're talking about," but he didn't. He just said, "We're not going to have that." …I was pulled into a meeting with the counselors, and "your daughter's a problem child," and I'm thinking, you know, this child she gets so many compliments when she's away from me that I don't even believe, and all of a sudden she's this major problem child? …She was one that wouldn't necessarily comprehend exactly what the teachers were saying to her, so she needed that extra help. And they took that as her being a problem now. …But as far as the school went, nothing. (P1)

This next participant shared the responses she received from a teacher and the assistant principal:

> "They didn't do anything. The school didn't. The teacher didn't do anything. And then she was like, well maybe you should take the next step and talk to the assistant principal, let the assistant principal know that this is going on and let them observe the matter and everything. But I talked to the assistant principal and then that's where they were like "okay, they're going to call xxxx in and ask her what happened and ask her her story," and they were going to get the matter resolved. … But they didn't" (P2).

The responses that this participant received from the child's school include:

> "We'll handle the situation. Oh no, Ms. Xxxx, we'll take everything what you're saying into consideration and we'll handle the situation." And it never got handled until I came into the school. … And when she finally gets tired and has had enough and strikes a student, ya'll quick to suspend her. (P3)

Here is what this participant shared about the responses she received from her child's school:

> The initial responses were usually that "we're going to look into it, we will pull both students down separately, talk with them, and then find out what happened." So that was the initial response. I'll be honest, sometimes they did not get back to me and give me feedback, which was really concerning because I felt like if you're pulling her down and the other student down, that the parent should have some information. … So I will say that when I brought it to his attention, he figured out, you know, the seating arrangement, but I had to bring it to his attention. (P4)

Another participant stated:

> But she did mention to me that she was going to talk to this child's teacher. And I did not get a follow up from her. …And surprisingly I called the office, I think on Tuesday I called the office, and I said I wanted to come in and have a meeting. Well they have yet to call me back, and that was about two, three weeks ago. …She assured me that they would take some actions and follow up, and they haven't followed up yet. So I haven't met with administrators. … I heard nothing on Thursday. And Friday I called in and she was like, "Oh yeah, I forgot." (P5)

This next participant's description of the kind of responses she received from her child's school indicated there was also a lack of support from school personnel. She mentioned:

> "Said no, they don't have money to provide a conductor or assistant who going to watch the kids on the school bus. … She said they can't handle it because it's after the school. … Lady said "okay, great, make police report." That's what I don't know if it's a teacher or the vice principal told me that. (P6)

The last quotation here also illustrated some responses that a participant received by a child's teacher:

> "She said she'll find out what's going on and e-mail me back. … She e-mailed me, she told me she didn't hear anything about xxxx getting bullied. … I e-mailed her again. … She said there's two supervisors at recess. And said she spoke to them and they said nothing was going on" (P7).

The quotations mentioned above were responses from each participant, explaining how their child's school responded to their concerns of their child's victimization. Again, all seven participants indicated in one way or another that their concerns/complaints were not adequately being addressed, and, therefore, the issue was determined to be *unresolved*. The summary section below describes the overall findings of this study.

Summary

The results from the research questions indicated that parents recognized when their children were not happy or were not behaving normally. Their children's victimization allowed parents to witness the impact of their children's victimization,

firsthand, in their homes, and immediately seek help. Parents were emotionally disturbed by their children's victimization. This emotional stress that parents experienced also led them to take action and reach out to their children's school to resolve the matter. Although parents contacted their children's schools to obtain answers and solutions about the bullying incidents, they ultimately felt helpless and dissatisfied, as school personnel were unsupportive. In the end, parents considered school bullying as a problem and expect schools to use better approaches to addressing the issue. Furthermore, the results are evidence that the issue of school bullying is one that needs further attention, as its many facets and layers do not align. In other words, the results indicated that schools are not working amicably with parents; as a result, parents' experiences with schools are unpleasant as the issue is left unresolved or is inadequately addressed. The families of children who are victimized by bullying are faced with delicate matters in their homes (including the parents' own feelings), which are triggered from the bullying; and parents are left to take matters into their own hands, (e.g., confront child's bully, file a complaint, or remove child from school) after several failed attempts to obtain help or support from the schools. Parents find bullying to be a problem and are willing to lend their suggestions to work toward eliminating it in their child's school. Although each participant's experience was unique, they shared key commonalities that illuminated the themes. Additional in-depth research and more sophisticated analyses may draw more sound conclusions on this topic and population. For example, these results may not be generalizable to a larger population, and, therefore, additional research is suggested to include other ethnic backgrounds, race, gender, and socioeconomic factors other than what was shown in Table 1. Also, because the majority of this study's participants were

from Montgomery County, Maryland school districts (i.e., six out of seven participants were from Montgomery County, Maryland), future study may consider extending the locations of where participants reside to better understand if parents from other areas have different experiences of school bullying.

In this chapter I discussed the population studied, the recruitment of participants, participants' demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness (research quality), theme generation, and the results of the study. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the interpretation of the findings, and implications for social change based on these findings. Also I present recommendations for future study and conclusions in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of school bullying among parents whose children were or had been victims of school bullying in Montgomery County and Prince Georges County, Maryland. Results showed that, overall, participants were dissatisfied with their child's school response to bullying, as school administrators were reluctant to support parents who expressed concerns about their child's victimization from school bullying. Additionally, study findings revealed participants were persistent in bringing bullying incidents to the attention of teachers and school administrators, whether by going to the school in person, calling the secretary, filing a formal report, or e-mailing teachers; parents consistently reached out to their child's school to try to resolve the issue.

Specifically, results showed that parents did not find school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies, or programs to be as supportive as they imagined. Parents and siblings of the victims of school bullying were also impacted by the issue; hence, family dynamics were adversely affected. Not only did the victims of school bullying undergo some emotional stresses, parents who experienced this phenomenon also experienced negative emotional impacts. Results provided evidence that issues persist in the way schools understand bullying, and as a result their method of addressing the issue is inadequate, leaving parents and their victimized child dissatisfied with the school's response.

As stated in the Chapter 2 literature review section, a preliminary review of the study showed that parents of children who are victims of school bullying have an

unsatisfactory relationship with school administrators and teachers in addressing school bullying (e.g., Humphrey & Crisp, 2008; James, 2012; J. Brown et al., 2013). Results from this research did not only add to the body of literature relating to parents' perspectives about school bullying, but also supported the components of their experience. Further, new information contributed to the body of literature about the impact of school bullying on the victims' home environment and family dynamics. The following discussion reviews the findings from the results described in Chapter 4 and compares those results to previous research found in the peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter 2.

Interpretation of the Findings

Humphrey and Crisp (2008) found that parents expected teachers who were teaching kindergarten children would be aware of bullying in their schools or classrooms, but instead teachers were unaware when bullying occurred. Further, some teachers were clear that they preferred not to use the terms bullying, bully, or victim, and would rather use terms such as inappropriate or unacceptable behavior. In their study, parents were left with emotions like sadness, anger, hurt, isolation, powerlessness, and guilt for being unable to protect their child. Parents in the present study experienced the same feelings as discovered in Humphrey and Crisp's study. I also discovered that some teachers in elementary schools were unaware of bullying until the parent brought it to their attention. Other parents in the present study believed that although some teachers were aware of bullying, they chose to ignore it. The terms bullying, bully, and victims might not be used in some schools in an attempt not to label students (Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). However, as mentioned in the present study by a participant, school officials may want to

reconsider this notion so that the proper intervention measures could be applied to help solve the issue (P5).

J. Brown et al. (2013) revealed that parents thought school officials' did not have the best interventions in place and therefore felt uncertain as to where to direct their bullying complaints. After the school secretary directed parents to speak with the school's counselor, they were told that there was no way to be helped. Their study also revealed that some parents sought outside counseling and removed their child from the school in an attempt to escape bullying. In the present study, results were the same.

In support of Humphrey and Crisp's (2008) study, James' (2012) research also revealed that parents were left with feelings of frustration and anger with teachers and school officials, as they felt school personnel ignored their child's victimization and their level of management was ineffective; as a result, parents perceived school personnel negatively and were dissatisfied. Results from the present study echoed those findings. In studies conducted by Bauman and Del Rio (2006), Maunder and Tattersall (2010), and Yoon and Kerber (2003), teachers' responses to bullying were contingent on how they defined bullying. Further, they determined that physical (or overt) and some forms of verbal bullying were more serious than relational bullying (i.e., indirect, covert bullying); therefore, teachers responded to those they considered to be serious. This factor was supported in the present study in that whether or not teachers saw bullying as serious, the majority of the parents in the present study whose children were physically and verbally bullied felt teachers and school administrators did not see bullying to be serious or was less severe.

Waasdorp et al. (2011) found that parents responded to their child's victimization based on whether they thought it was harmful, direct, or indirect. Parents also identified as being more satisfied with the school's social climate and intervention plans when their children were young (i.e., elementary school). The present study did support the Waasdorp et al. viewpoint in that parents' reacted/responded to their child's victimization when it became physical or escalated. Parents in the present study also responded to their child's victimization when they saw the direct impact it had on their child, and in their homes. However, the present study was inconsistent with Waasdorp et al. in that all but one participant's child was not in elementary school when the bullying occurred (in middle school). Further, the parents of the children who were in elementary school at the time of their victimization were left feeling disappointed and unsatisfied with the schools' intervention (or lack thereof). Therefore, the present study may conclude that parents dealing with this issue were less satisfied with the schools' intervention plans when their children were at a younger age.

In summary, prior research about parents' experience and meaning of school bullying as it relates to their child's victimization indicated that parents and school officials' interaction was not fluid. In other words, previous and present findings suggested a disconnection between the school's perception of bullying and that of parents, leaving parents dissatisfied with the schools approach to handling bullying. Overall, I conclude that parents whose children have experienced bullying have a negative perception about teachers, school administrators, and antibullying programs or policies in their child's school.

Limitations of the Study

Several identifiable limitations exist in the present study. The first factor limiting this study was having only one participant who represented the Prince Georges County school district area. Although the participant's experience was quite similar to those of parents in the Montgomery County school district, a concern arose about underrepresentation. Findings may have been influenced by the sample size of this study. Perhaps a larger sample of 10 or more that also included a broader ethnicity may have suggested a sound conclusion about parents' perceptions of school bullying. Finally, the focus of this study was exclusively on the parents' perceptions of school bullying, rather than that of the teachers and school administrators. Including the teachers' and school administrators' perspectives on school bullying may lend a better understanding to parents' perspectives.

Recommendations

As previously mentioned, additional studies in various geographic locations in the State of Maryland should be considered. Future research should include larger samples using qualitative and quantitative approaches to replicate and expand on the findings from the present study. The topic would definitely benefit from quantitative research that examines parents' perception of school bullying through quantifiable interview questions. Further, as stated in this study's limitations, additional research should include teachers' and school administrators' perspectives of school bullying to gain more knowledge on schools' cultures/protocols as it pertains to bullying. Again, having other races/ethnicities (i.e., Asian, White, Hispanic, Native American etc.) may also be an area that future researchers should explore, as the primary race of this study was African Americans, by

default. Also, an emphasis is made suggesting that future researchers explore a more diverse population to include gender, as this study only had one male parent, and other areas such as socioeconomic class and marital status. Studies aimed in these directions would provide critical information on schools' operating practices in coping with bullying in schools, among parents of victims, and among perpetrators of bullying.

As a recommendation for action, the results from this study indicated that schools and families need to work together to address bullying. Findings suggested that parents were not receiving full support from teachers and school administrators about bullying. Therefore, the actions I recommend to improve the way schools address bullying include the following:

- Establish firm policies regarding bullying to which schools must adhere; otherwise, they will be sanctioned for violations.
- Improve educational curricula by incorporating school-based subjects on social skills in kindergarten through high school, as a schoolwide agenda.
- Provide ongoing school bullying prevention training for teachers, support staff, such as counselors, social workers, and school psychologists, and school administrators.
- Improve schools' administrative management by enforcing antibullying policies or programs.
- Include parents, teachers, support staff, and administrators in the strategic planning process of bullying intervention and prevention programs to improve the relationship and communication patterns between parents and schools.

- Create a school culture that promotes relationship skills and positive choices.
- Provide socially appropriate programs that yield a sense of belonging and a happy learning environment.
- Improve local human services youth programs and practices by enforcing current and new antibullying policies in local and/or state agencies.
- Disseminate these findings through conferences, presentations, and publications that target educators, policy makers, and parents, to enhance continued and collective efforts to eliminate school bullying.

Implications for Social Change

Study results identified issues of great significance to the school community, in particular. Findings from this research showed that parents whose children have been victimized by school bullying assign dissatisfaction to their interaction with teachers and school administrators about bullying. Educators and policymakers can use the insights gained from this study about the social reality of parents' experience with school bullying to improve and implement strategies that address bullying more efficiently. This research study reminds educators of their roles in the schools and alerts policy makers of the issues surrounding school bullying so they may work toward enhancing strict policies for schools. Hence, the recommendations provided in this research are in alignment with the Maryland Safe Schools Reporting Act of 2005 (July) that was passed by the Maryland General Assembly and signed into law by the Governor, at the time. The law requires all local school systems/districts to report incidents of harassment, intimidation, or bullying to school administrators. It also requires schools to utilize a form that was developed in

order for students, parents, and family relatives to report any of the aforementioned incidents. Further, local school districts are mandated to record specific information from the forms and submit them to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to include in its annual report to the Maryland General Assembly (Maryland State Department of Education, 2014). The study also provided an implication for positive social change whereby improved communication among teachers, support staff, school administrators, and parents can help discourage and eliminate school bullying. Further, the contribution that this study brings to the literature and field is that it helps in creating productive citizens of society, preventing possible legal claims/actions by parents against school personnel for failing to identify the signs or intervene with bullying issues, and helps save the cost of alternative school programs for troubled youth. Finally, school administrators can use this study to help incorporate problem-solving and life skills in their school curriculum rather than merely applying technical subject matter in schools.

Conclusion

Positive social change in schools regarding bullying is possible if educators become more supportive of parents whose children are victims of bullying. This type of administrative support could aid educators to understand parents' perceptions about helping their child cope with bullying while getting the help they need to resolve the issue; and also inform educators about how parents perceive schools' management of bullying. The present study contributes to the limited literature on parents' perceptions about school administrators, teachers, antibullying policies, or programs, with the additional insight of how victimization translates into the homes of the families who are impacted. Using the symbolic interactionism theoretical framework as part of my study

aided me in identifying the participants' social reality of the phenomenon investigated. My initial review of my theoretical underpinnings aligned with what I discovered in my study. For instance, based on participants' interactions with their child's teachers and school administrators, the findings depicted their "subjective meaning" of their overall experiences. Therefore, the findings support the symbolic interactionism theory, which indicated that people form their meanings from their social or physical environment. It leaves the notion that there is a minimum to no room for a right or wrong answer; it is how one interprets his or her experience. The results from this study suggest that school officials could work hand in hand with parents to develop prevention and intervention plans to address bullying. Results also included recommendations that could change schools' approaches to address bullying so that bullying is diminished or eliminated. Continuing research could help improve bullying interventions and the practice of educators. The ultimate benefit that this doctoral research provided is the promotion of safer schools in the United States.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions For Parents

Exploring the Meaning of School Bullying Among Parents of Victimized Children

1. What are your experiences regarding school bullying due to your child's victimization?
2. How would you define bullying prior to your child's victimization and after your child was victimized?
3. How would you describe the types of responses, or support you received when reporting your child's victimization of bullying to his or her school administrators?
4. What is your perspective on your child's school's involvement with antibullying policies or programs?
5. What feelings evoked after learning that your child is/was a victim of school bullying?
6. What steps did you take to address/report your child's victimization of school bullying?
7. What is your perspective on teachers' awareness and involvement with school bullying at your child's school?
8. How did you learn that your child is/was a victim of school bullying?
9. How would you describe the effect of your child's victimization of school bullying on your home environment? Did it also affect you as a parent/guardian and/or other family members?
10. What other lived experiences about school bullying or your child's victimization would you like to share?
11. How would you interpret your experience with your child's victimization of school bullying?

Appendix B: School Bullying Flyer 1

Exploring the Meaning of School Bullying Among Parents of Victimized Children

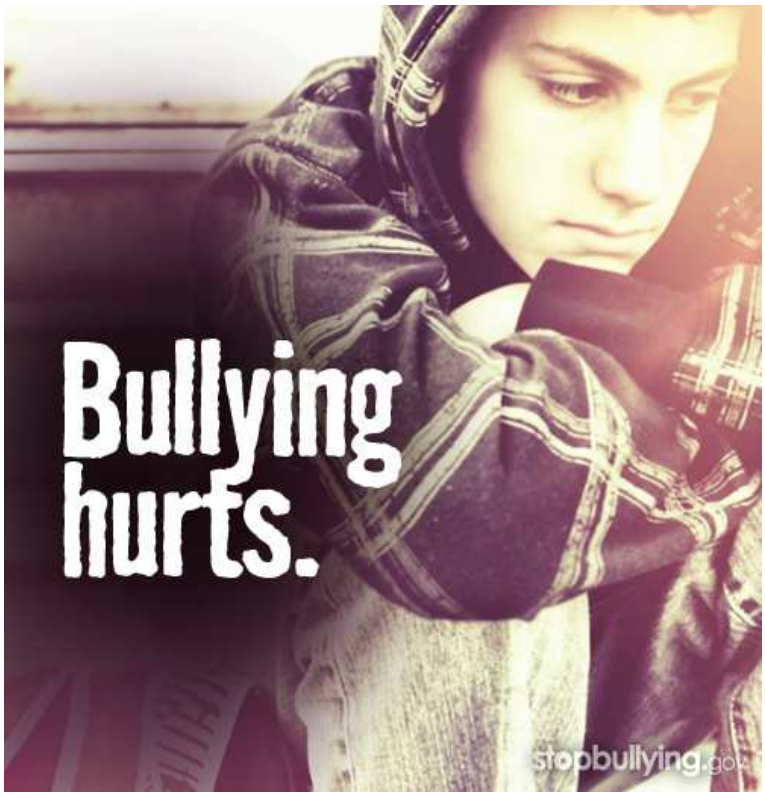
ATTENTION: Parents! Do you have a child who has been a victim of school bullying? If so, participation in a doctoral research study is highly needed. Interested candidates can share their experiences of their child's victimization, by participating in a face-to-face interview with a student researcher.

To participate in this study, PLEASE call Mildred Peyton at (240) 308-2828 or Email at mildred.peyton@waldenu.edu. Thank you for your interest!

Appendix C: School Bullying Flyer 2

Exploring the Meaning of School Bullying Among Parents of Victimized Children

ATTENTION: **Parents!** Do you have a child who has been a victim of school bullying? If so, participation in a doctoral research study is highly needed. Interested candidates can share their experiences of their child's victimization, by participating in a face-to-face interview with a student researcher.



To participate in this study, PLEASE call **Mildred Peyton** at **(240) 308-2828** or Email at **mildred.peyton@waldenu.edu**.

Thank you for your interest!!

Appendix D: Letter of Introduction

Exploring the Meaning of School Bullying Among Parents of Victimized Children

Hello,

My name is Mildred Peyton and I am a doctoral candidate in the Human Services program at Walden University. I am working on completing my Doctor of Philosophy degree with a concentration in Social Policy Analysis & Planning. I am conducting a dissertation research study on how parents whose children experienced school bullying perceive school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family's dynamics. The study is titled, *Exploring the Meaning of School Bullying among Parents of a Victimized Child.*
This letter is to provide you with information about the study and your rights as a participant.

I understand that your time is valuable and your participation in this study is vital to the success of the study. However, it is important for you to know that your participation is voluntary and that you can withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without consequences. Should you choose to continue with the study, I will coordinate a time to review the informed consent with you in detail. The informed consent includes, among other things, information about safeguarding your anonymity, research procedures, and the limits of your participation in the study. You will receive a copy of the consent for your records after we review it. Also, you will receive a copy of your responses and a summary of the results to help you understand how parents whose children experienced school bullying perceived their children's school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family's dynamics.

The goal is to have each interview sessions last between 45 minutes to an hour, or schedule three separate interviews with each participant for 45 minutes each.

If you are interested in participating in this study, have any questions about this letter, or need additional information to help you decide whether you wish to proceed with this study, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at (240) 308-2828 or mildred.peyton@waldenu.edu.

Sincerely,

Mildred Peyton
Doctoral Candidate, Human Services
Walden University

Appendix E: School Bullying Post on Facebook

Exploring the Meaning of School Bullying Among Parents of Victimized Children

Hi Facebook Family and Friends!

I'm conducting a doctoral research study on school bullying, and I'm interested in collecting data from parents whose children have been victimized by bullying in both the Montgomery County and Prince Georges County areas.

If you are a parent, or guardian who fits this criteria, please send me a private inbox message for additional information on how to be a participant in this study.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this study!

Mildred

Appendix F: Consent Form

Exploring the Meaning of School Bullying Among Parents of Victimized Children

You are invited to participate in a research study of parents whose children were victims of school bullying. You are invited as a possible participant because you are a parent of a student who has been a victim of bullying. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before acting on this invitation to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Mildred Peyton, who is a doctoral candidate at Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to explore how parents whose children experienced school bullying perceive school administrators, teachers, antibullying school policies or programs, and their family's dynamics.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Be interviewed face-to-face by Mildred Peyton for 45 minutes or more that is agreed upon by interviewer and the participant.
- Allow the researcher to audiotape and transcribe all interviews.
- Review the written transcripts of the interview to ensure the interview was recorded accurately.

Here are some sample questions you may be asked during the interview:

- What are your experiences regarding the victimization of your child?
- What feelings evoked upon learning of your child's victimization?
- What is your perspective on the type of support, or lack thereof, you received from your child's school when you reported your child's victimization?
- How did you act upon the school's response to your child's victimization?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Please note that your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You have the freedom to decide not to participate in this study. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable to answer.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
There is minimal risk of psychological stress during the interview. If you have questions about how to report bullying at your child's school, please contact your child's school

counselor, teachers, administrators, or local health department/community agencies to seek further assistance or support in this matter. However, being in this study will not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. As a result of your participation in this study, the interviewer will benefit from data collection of your beliefs and viewpoints for this doctoral study of understanding the experiences of parents whose children are victimized by bullying and their family's dynamics.

Payment/Compensation:
There is no payment for participating in the study.

Privacy/Confidentiality:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. Before the tape is transcribed by a professional transcription service, the researcher will delete any personally identifying information on the tape. The professional transcribers have also signed an agreement in understanding that your information remains confidential even in their possession. The researcher, Mildred Peyton, will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. In addition, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. If any report of this study that might be published, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant. Data will be kept secure in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Mildred Peyton. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via mildred.peyton@waldenu.edu or (240) 308-2828. Also, you may contact the researcher's doctoral advisor, Dr. Dorothy Scotten at dorothy.scotten@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368 ext. 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 11-11-14-0295632 and it expires on November 10, 2015. You will be given a copy of the signed consent form to keep.

Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information and I asked questions and received answers. I feel and understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. I consent to participate in the study.

Printed Name of Participant _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix G: Demographic Information/Survey—Parents

Exploring the Meaning of School Bullying Among Parents of Victimized Children

This section asks questions that describe some general characteristics about you and your family. This information helps us understand general characteristics of people who have completed the survey. The information from this survey will be included in the doctoral study I am undertaking at Walden University. Participation is voluntary and no responses will be identifiable in any reporting done by the researcher. This survey should take approximately five (5) minutes to complete and will be completed prior to the interview. Do not write any names on this form.

1. Age:
2. Gender: Female _____ Male _____
3. Marital Status: Single _____ Married _____ Widowed _____ Divorced _____
4. Educational Achievement Level: GED _____ High School Diploma _____ Some College ____ Associate's Degree ____ Bachelor's Degree _____ Master's Degree ____ Doctorate Degree _____
5. Child's Educational Level: Elementary School _____ Middle School _____ High School _____
6. Child's Gender: Female _____ Male _____
7. What is your ethnic or cultural background? (Please check one)
   - European-Caucasian _____
   - African American _____
   - Hispanic-Latino _____
   - Asian-American/Pacific Islander _____
   - Native American-American Indian/Alaskan Native _____
   - Other _____
8. Socio-Economic Class: Upper Class ___ Middle Class ___ Poor ___ Working-Class ____
9. Place of Residency: Montgomery County _____ Prince Georges County _____

Appendix H: Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

Exploring the Meaning of School Bullying Among Parents of Victimized Children

Name of Signer:

During the course of my activity in transcribing data for this research: "Exploring the Meaning of School Bullying Among Parents of A Victimized Child" I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquires, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: _____ Date: _____