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The Implementation of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act: New Jersey High School Educators' Perceptions

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MA, Walden University, 2004

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

New Jersey's high school teachers have many responsibilities to their students: they must educate them, work to mold their strength of character, and protect them from harming each other. The Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABR), legally fortified these goals by protecting students from harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB), at the state level. Previous research has indicated that incident rates for these negative behaviors are growing globally. This reality has driven the need for intervention and prevention programming; however, few instances of successful implementation exist. An important gap remains in the current literature, as there is still a need to understand the teachers' perceptions of their role as the frontline defenders of antibullying policies. The primary area of focus for this qualitative study was on the challenges and supports encountered by teachers responsible for implementing their high school's antibullying program. Information was gathered using a phenomenological design through semistructured, one-on-one interviews of 12 high school educators from three unique school districts. Lived experiences were interpreted using Espelage and Swearer's social-ecological system framework and Darley and Latané's *bystander theory* framework. The findings from this study gave voice to those responsible for implementing the ABR. Significant findings included policies that require reactive interactions with students where proactive measures would have been prefered, a lack of top-down communication, and ineffective prevention and intervention program training materials. An impetus for implementing policy change was established, and the potential for social change was welcomed through a move toward proactive measures in the school setting.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

New Jersey's high schools are deeply impacted by harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) behaviors among students. As the problem has grown more pervasive, legislation has been established requiring faculty and staff to implement prevention strategies or suffer legal consequences. Much is known about how and why children bully, but the need still exists to understand the roles played by those individuals responsible for implementing antibullying measures. This knowledge is essential, not only because monetary fines and even the loss of licensure can be imposed should these educators meet with failure, but also because further understanding the perspective of these individuals will likely remove obstacles in program implementation, allow for more accurate program effectiveness assessment, and promote positive morale (Ansary, Elias, Greene, & Green, 2015).

Bullying exists as a nuanced phenomenon, as everyone who has participated as the aggressor, victim, or bystander experiences it uniquely (Olweus, 2003). This does not, however, mean that there are no areas of consensus in the current body of research. It has been universally accepted that bullying is a growing problem, and its presence is detrimental to the efficient functioning of school systems. The pervasive nature of school bullying serves as an unwanted distraction within the classroom (Yeager, 2015). Where direct bullying is present, children will choose to forego learning in an effort to focus instead on maintaining their personal safety. The negative actions of a few have the potential to reduce concentration and inhibit learning, both of which are precursors for

depressed grade point averages even for bystanders, as they indirectly experience bullying (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012). Bullying also creates an atmosphere of fear, increasing student absenteeism (Kann et al., 2014; Kann et al., 2016) and decreasing student and teacher morale (Skinner, Babinski, & Gifford, 2014). Furthermore, it allows distrust to fester, as students and parents no longer believe that the school systems are capable of keeping children safe (Yoon, Sulkowski, & Bauman, 2014).

In 2010, a series of student suicides brought national media attention to bullies in the classroom. In response, the New Jersey legislature amended existing law to include the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABR) (New Jersey Education Association, 2010; Sacco, Silbaugh, Corredor, Casey, & Doherty, 2012). The act was created to halt bullying's deleterious effects through policies that offered harsh punishment for those school districts allowing negative behaviors to continue. The law states that teachers and administrators are specifically held accountable for ensuring that students have educational surroundings that promote learning. The ABR outlined methods to prevent, report, investigate, and respond to school bullying. A failure to comply with these procedures leaves faculty and staff vulnerable to litigation (New Jersey ABR, 2010). Researchers have indicated that the presence of HIB in schools is a universally growing problem (Yeager, 2015). No conclusive evidence has been gathered for a successful educator-only driven prevention program (Olweus, 2003; Sacco et al., 2012), yet New Jersey is requiring their teachers to represent the frontline against bullying. Collaboration between schools and communities is finding favor within the research, but only those

employed by the New Jersey schools need worry about the liability associated with failure (Ansary et al., 2015).

In this study I sought to understand the thoughts and concerns of New Jersey's high school teachers as they shoulder the burden of preventing bullying within their schools. This area of study is relatively unexplored, as the ABR amendment went into effect during the 2011-2012 school year. The law was enacted to improve academic achievement, repair school climate, and allow students to experience feelings of personal safety (NJEA, 2010). Studying the perceived efficacy of teachers as they enforce this policy has shed light on the logistical feasibility of the law, and emphasized the effectiveness of bully prevention measures from the teachers' perspectives.

This chapter includes an introduction of the primary focus of the study: New Jersey high school teachers' viewpoints concerning their role in preventing school-related bullying. Background concerning the rules and responsibilities as they apply to New Jersey's teachers will be discussed. Similarly, the nature of the study will be defined, and the specific parameters of the research will be outlined in detail. Justification for conducting the interviews and the general need for gathering data will also be offered.

Background

Schools have always sought to create a safe learning environment in which all children can learn. Instances of harassment, intimidation, and bullying function to directly impede progress within the classroom. Researchers have shown that HIB victims are not only emotionally and physically at risk, but they are also more likely to be academically impacted by their experience (Shah, 2011). Unnecessary academic losses

are traditionally curtailed by using detentions and suspensions to manage the bullying behaviors. Researchers have indicated that the perpetrators of bullying feel victimized by the school discipline system and, therefore, feel justified in retaliation (Duncan, 2011). This outcome perpetuates a cycle of punishment by educators and escalating vengeful behaviors by bullies. There exists a very real need to break this cycle in New Jersey – not only because it is unhealthy for all involved, but also because state law now requires it. This study functioned as an original contribution as it addresses the unique situation experienced by New Jersey's high school teachers beholden to the ABR, also known as the ABR law. The burden to enforce this law exists for teachers on many levels, as researchers have found an increase in bullying behaviors of all types on an international level (Yeager, 2015). Educators are charged with curtailing it within their building, or punitive damages will be assigned (New Jersey ABR, 2010).

These teachers are subject to adhering to the bolstered ABR, which was added to New Jersey's Education Statute 18A (New Jersey ABR, 2010). The new provisions took effect during the 2011-2012 school year, and reporting and procedural requirements for faculty and staff actively changed the climate in schools statewide. Stricter punishments for students who engage in harassment, intimidation and/or bullying behaviors (HIB) were mandated. When faculty and staff members do not report such student conduct, the law indicates that they are not immune from individualized punishment (NJEA, 2010; Sacco et al., 2012).

The introduction of these changes and their enforcement by the state represent a paradigm shift. What was once seen as the collective responsibility of many can now be

pinpointed to the specific failure of one or a few educators, as per the law (NJEA, 2010).

The high stakes associated with this new structure precipitated the need for close study.

A gap in knowledge existed because the perceptions and experiences of those teachers

who have been placed on the frontlines had yet to be examined.

Problem Statement

The prevalence of student-to-student bullying has prompted efforts to both

understand these behaviors and curtail them. While there is a significant understanding

of the part that high school peers play in bullying, there exists a gap in the literature

concerning teachers' perceptions of their bullying prevention role within the school

setting (Salmivalli, 2010). This breach is particularly significant as educators in the state

of New Jersey are bound to follow the New Jersey ABR, which was touted as the nation's

strictest HIB prevention policy when it was enacted (Perez-Peña, 2011). The law states

that those educators who are unable to properly identify and manage bullying are liable

for punitive damages (New Jersey ABR, 2010).

The basis of all public school policies in New Jersey utilizes the ABR's definition

of bullying which strongly emphasizes students' civil rights. Harassment, intimidation,

and bullying, as related to the educational setting, is defined as antagonistic behavior

taking place on or in relation to school grounds or school busses that disrupts school

functioning. Here, the negative actions, whether communicated verbally, electronically,

by hand written, or through physical perpetration, have been motivated by the victim's

actual or perceived characteristics. These identifiers may include religion, race, color,

ancestry, national origin, creed, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation,

mental/physical/sensory difference or disability, or any other differentiating trait. The

law notes that a reasonable person would know that her or his behavior as an aggressor is

a source of physical and/or emotional harm. Thus, the hostile educational environment

created for the victim by the aggressor is considered intentional and harmful (New Jersey

ABR, 2010). Effectively, where there is bullying, there is a compromised learning

environment and a potential decrease in overall academic achievement (Espelage,

Polanin, & Low, 2014).

Emerging information indicates that there is a need for further research into

effectively implementing HIB prevention/intervention programs (Ansary et al., 2015;

Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Veenstra, Lindenberg, Huitsing, Sainio, &

Salmivalli, 2014). Additionally, empirical evidence indicates that the scope of bullying is

also increasing, due to the emergence of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). With

all facets of HIB behavior on the rise, a critical need existed to examine the way in which

students receive information and motivation concerning bullying prevention and

intervention. Classroom teachers are tasked with addressing HIB as they have been

established as the first line of defense: they are the primary detection and preventative

agents against any and all negative student-to-student behaviors (NJEA, 2010).

This change was a top-down decision made by the New Jersey Legislature and the

Department of Education, as they have required each educator to present a bullying-

related lesson within their curriculum each year (New Jersey ABR, 2010). Teachers

muster a level of expertise when conducting these lessons, whether the proficiency exists

or not (even after the required training has been provided). The goal of teacher-led

antibullying efforts is, of course increased student awareness, but the potential for a deleterious effect is equally probable (Yeager, 2015). Methods of confrontation and teacher-led mediation were initially thought to be a helpful way to end bullying behaviors. A teacher who means well, who is invested in preventing bullying in the classroom, may offer to sit down with those students who are perceived to be unable to reconcile their differences. While conflict resolution and peer mediation present as effective tactics for restoring and maintaining appropriate behavior in the classroom, they fail to take into consideration the very essence of bullying. HIB behaviors involve an aggressor and a victim. Mediation points to an equality that does not exist within the initial peer relationship (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2005). Researchers have shown that innocent victims are less likely to report bullying when they believe that they will be asked to shoulder the responsibility of stopping the antagonist's behavior, as they, too, will be admitting fault (Cohen, 2002). This observation involves a nuanced and layered understanding of bullying that may not be entirely evident to all teaching staff, as they may not be well versed in child psychology.

A meaningful gap in the current literature was detected because the perspectives of high school teachers responsible for adhering to New Jersey's ABR was unknown. The need for this research has only recently been established, as the antibullying state law was only passed in 2010, requiring full implementation by 2012. An extensive body of knowledge has been established within the primary and middle school staffs, but the same had not been true for high school educators. Also unique to high school is the amount of previous exposure that students have had to bullying prevention measures.

Each new graduating class has had one more year of training than the class ahead of them, further complicating the role played by their teachers. These additional factors, coupled with the research indicating that bullying exists for different reasons among children of different age groups (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011), established the need for the present study.

Purpose

There was a need for increased understanding concerning the multifaceted role that educators play while they representing the front line of all antibullying efforts within the educational setting for students. In this study I utilized a phenomenological approach to gather the perspectives of high school teachers during one-on-one interviews. These individuals were asked to shed light on their understanding of working to adhere to New Jersey's legislative guidelines while also presenting their curriculum.

These teachers may suffer punitive damages or lose their licensure as a result of a single failed attempt to curtail escalating aggression. The state's original antibullying policy was enacted in 2002 and has been amended twice: most significantly in 2011, and again in 2012 (A.1874, 2002; A. 749, 2012). The motivations attributed to the actions of bullies and a better understanding of the lasting harm done to their victims are among the most significant factors for the improved state policies (Ansary et al., 2015). Simple trainings in which traditional stereotypes and biases are used to demonstrate those behaviors that teachers should recognize and prevent are no longer an adequate representation of the scope of bullying or the liability present to educational personnel (Berger, 2007).

New Jersey teachers are tasked with protecting the psyche of their students, and state law dictates that an inability to do so will result in damages ranging from financial consequences to a loss of licensure (NJEA, 2010). Yet whether teachers feel prepared to undertake this task, given the high stakes, remained an elusive concept. This question was the core phenomenon of interest for my study. A phenomenological approach addressed this inquiry as it specifically applied to the unique requirements of high school teachers. As the first people to present HIB-related information to these now young adults, these educators are responsible for disseminating material that promotes tolerance and dissuades the continuance of bullying behaviors (New Jersey ABR, 2010).

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of New Jersey high school teachers regarding their role as the first line of defense against harassment, intimidation, and bullying?
2. What have been the individual challenges of New Jersey high school teachers since the implementation of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights?
3. What additional supports do New Jersey high school teachers perceive as necessary for fulfilling their role as the first line of defense against harassment, intimidation, and bullying?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

Bullying is a complex issue that is considered to be the result of various social, emotional, physical, institutional, and community-based factors. Espelage and Swearer's (2004) social-ecological system perspective, an adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's (1977)

ecological model, contends that HIB behaviors result from influences across these multiple environments. Children share complex relationships with peers, family members, individuals within their community, and authority figures, all of whom shape their understanding of their role in daily life (Swearer & Espelage, 2012).

The social-ecological model may also be applied to educators, as the grouping of different environmental influences provides a framework on which prevention and intervention programs may be built and applied. Understanding what uniquely motivates bullying within a fixed environment allowed for the sources of aggression to be identified, processed, and prevented (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). The social-ecological model provided the first lens through which the study's phenomenon was viewed.

A second part of the conceptual foundation is *bystander theory* from Darley and Latané (1968), which addresses the teachers' role since they serve as the primary form of HIB intervention for students. This theory was developed by social psychologists Darley and Latané after studying the murder of Kitty Genovese in 1964. It was believed that she went unaided for 35 minutes as she was being attacked, although there were 38 bystanders present. The development of the *bystander theory* is composed of five main parts in which bystanders must (a) notice a potentially dangerous event, (b) determine the need for intervention, (c) take on ownership or responsibility for acting on the issue, (d) decide on an effective means of intervention or how to help, and (e) take action whether violence is prevented or victims are cared for (Amar, Sutherland, & Kesler, 2012; Burns, 2009).

The implementation of the *bystander theory* allowed the role played by teachers to be carefully explicated, providing a direct look at efficacy, motivation, preparation, and finally action. This model provides an opportunity to delve into those challenges referenced in the research questions, as the process of intervention has been broken into the five discrete parts. The larger intention of using both Darley and Latané's (1968) *bystander theory* framework and Espelage and Swearer's (2004) social-ecological framework was to find and detail the motivations of teachers when challenged by HIB behaviors. Chapter 2 will provide greater insight as to how these theories intend to uncover those ties to teacher action within this study. Similarly, current research literature will also be utilized to outline the significance of applying these theories to the intended research questions.

Nature of the Study

The central phenomenon, the role of high school teachers as they implement New Jersey's ABR, was examined within this phenomenological study. The shared experience of maintaining the front line against bullying within New Jersey's high schools was explored as the event that all study participants had in common. The intention of the face-to-face interviews and general data collection was to develop a collective understanding of the very essence of the impact the policy has had on these individuals. This methodology was ideal for examining the perceptions of high school educators, as they function as a major component of the ABR's implementation (Creswell, 2013). Since the research sought to understand the impact of the antibullying legislation on study participants, the focus remained on viewing the occurrence through

the eyes of those who have experienced it. Thus, the methodology favors a phenomenological approach (Patton, 2002).

This methodology was applied to the high school setting where teachers were interviewed; their perceptions about preventing bullying were explored in the context of their role as the frontline trustee of antibullying legislation. The data were recorded, coded, cataloged, and further analyzed to determine prevailing themes and common perceptions. This study focused on the perceptions of the educators as they described their readiness to identify instances of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. Attention focused on the implementation of the legislation as it pertains to the teachers' awareness of their ability to successfully identify, provide education about, and prevent all HIB related behaviors. The specific punishments of and impact on educational employees who are unable to meet the standard of the antibullying legislation was also explored with each participant, and their related opinions concerning liabilities were investigated. Teachers' perceptions about additional support needed to fulfill their roles in implementing the ABR regulations was discussed and recorded.

Definitions

The following terms were used throughout this study and are clarified below, as they may otherwise have multiple meanings:

HIB (Harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying): The New Jersey State Assembly via Chapter 122 of Pamphlet Law 2010 offered the most up-to-date definition of the negative behaviors associated with HIB in January of 2011. The criteria for harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying were determined to be represented by any

action, conveyed verbally, physically, electronically, or handwritten that is reasonably

viewed as targeting the victim's actual or perceived characteristics. These qualities

include, but are not limited to, race, religion, national origin, ancestry, gender, gender

identity, gender expression, sexual preference/orientation, mental or physical disability,

and/or any other distinctive trait that the victim may possess. The law notes that a

reasonable person would know that his or her behavior as an aggressor is a source of

physical and/or emotional harm, as they are causing damage to person(s) or property

and/or encouraging the victim(s) to be in a perpetual state of fear of said harm. Similarly,

the negative behaviors are defined as creating a hostile educational environment because

the disruption impacts both the normal operation of school functions and the ability of the

victim(s) to learn (New Jersey Anti-Bullying, 2010).

School climate: A school's climate is considered a complex structure as it is

composed of many interactive and moving pieces that are neither easily defined nor

universally quantifiable. In seminal research, Tagiuri (1968) established four

contributing dimensions to capture the essence of school climate. Firstly, ecology

variables include the physical structure of the building. Secondly, milieu or atmosphere

qualities include the characteristics of the faculty, staff, and students. Specifically, the

teachers' morale, education level, degree of preparation for classes, and general efficacy

are all noteworthy factors. Similarly, the socioeconomic status, race, and morale of

students are also considered. Social systems function as the third variable. The

interactions between the administration and faculty as well as students, the quality of

communication, the opportunities for student and teacher involvement in decision-

making, and the general relationships shared within the school community are all impactful on the social system. Finally, the cultural components include the commitment of all parties involved, the perceived norms, the general expectations placed on each member of the school system, the level of emphasis placed on academics, the degree of consistency, and the clarity of the common goals (Low & Van Ryzin, 2014).

Teacher/educator: New Jersey's faculty and staff are licensed and unionized at the state level. In the context of this study, *teacher* and *educator* are used interchangeably to represent those individuals who directly interact with the student body in an effort to impart knowledge. They handle presenting curriculum to their students, adhering to their employee contracts, actively fulfilling the requirements stipulated by their administration and board of education, and maintaining a positive presence within the community. The stakeholders to whom the teachers must directly report to are the students, parents, and school administration (NJEA, 2015).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

Assumptions

This study maintained several assumptions. The educators that elected to participate in this project did so in a meaningful way. The information offered during the structured interviews was truthful at all times. Further, it was assumed that the participants offered thoughtful and complete answers to each question. It is necessary to uphold these assumptions, as this phenomenological study cannot meet with any level of success if credibility were lost as a result of invalid data.

It was also assumed that bullying is present in the school system represented within the study. That is not to imply that this assumption precludes the participating school from finding success with their bullying prevention program, but it was expected that bullying exists at some level and does present as a troublesome issue. The current literature and research indicates that HIB behaviors are a pervasive issue nationally. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2013) conducts a biennial Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) through which it publishes data representing high school students, Grades 9-12, throughout the United States. The most recent findings, compiled in 2015, indicate that no substantial change has been detected in the following HIB-related factors: the numbers of students bringing weapons to school to protect themselves, absenteeism for those students who do not feel safe in school, and the total number of students who were bullied on school property (Kann et al., 2016).

Limitations

A criteria-based sampling strategy was used for this study. As such, this group was not wholly representative of the population, as volunteers were not be chosen at random, but instead because they met specific qualifications. Furthermore, the small sample came from school districts within New Jersey, which is home to 586 operational districts and 482 secondary schools (New Jersey Department of Education, 2016). Such a sampling fails to recognize the state's tremendous socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Each of these factors was attributed to influencing school climate as well as bullying behaviors and tendencies. As the profile of each school is different, so too is their prevalence of bullying (Low & Ryzin, 2014). Efforts were made to find districts

that represent as many of the statewide averages as possible in order to best embody a wide cross section of New Jersey educator experiences.

It should be noted that I am a public school educator, specifically a high school science teacher. While this research was not conducted where I am employed, a potential does exist for bias during the interview process, as most teachers consider one another colleagues and professional peers. Efforts were made via journaling and the recording of interviews or member checking to prevent bias. As an educator of 15 years, I have been a bystander to and have subsequently interrupted countless HIB behaviors. It was important for me to acknowledge and actively monitor the presence of my personal viewpoints concerning bullying as this study was conducted (Creswell, 2009).

Scope and Delimitations

This study focused on New Jersey's high school educators and the role they play in curtailing harassment, intimidation, and bullying. This specific focus was chosen in an effort to shed light on the way in which teachers perceive their role in bullying prevention in the context of the New Jersey ABR. The law outlines punitive damages and the possible forfeit of licensure for those educators who are unable to manage bullying (New Jersey ABR, 2010).

The population included within the study is limited to high school teachers. They are both unique and under-studied, as they are tasked with monitoring students whom they have only recently met; in contrast, most of these students have been together for their entire educational career thus far. These educators are at a distinct disadvantage, considering that the existing literature points to the most successful detection and

prevention measures taking place when the students are well known to those teachers tasked with detecting HIB behaviors (Leff & Kupersmidt, 1999; Yoon et al., 2014).

The focus on secondary schools alone was a purposeful delimitation within this study, establishing a clear boundary. The prevailing literature describes bullying as being a nuanced, peer-to-peer process that is perpetrated differently as children age and mature. The causes, effects, and general techniques evolve, becoming more complex as children become more capable of manipulating their surroundings (Brinson, 2005; Olweus, 1995; Papadaki & Giovazolias, 2015). This study focused on the way the negative behaviors of students in Grades 9-12 are managed by educators.

The specificity of the parameters I established within this study allowed for limited transferability. The results only apply to some public high schools within New Jersey. These boundaries are intentional and significant, as the demands placed on these educators are unique within their setting. It is not reasonable to assume that primary or middle school policies are the same as those occurring within high schools. Similarly, the young people themselves were expected, on average, to be different: there was a general expectation that they would be physically larger, more mature, and more autonomous (Kann et al., 2016).

The unique dynamic shared between high school teachers and students, especially where bullying is present, has lent itself to viewing this phenomenon through the theoretical lens of Espelage and Swearer's (2004) social-ecological framework. Further, providing structure to the portion of the study responsible for detailing how faculty and staff manage their obligation of curtailing HIB behaviors is best done by incorporating

Darley and Latané's (1968) *bystander theory* framework. While other theories have been successfully applied to bullying studies, the theories noted above are the best fit for the student age level and anticipated responsibility. They apply equally well to the roles and responsibilities of the teachers studied as they incorporate the school's structure as well as the students' emerging roles within their community. These students are close to entering young adulthood, which means their reach within society is greater than that of adolescents and pre-teens, thus allowing their grasp of social mores to play a more significant role in their day-to-day lives (Espelage, et al., 2014).

The reasonable measures utilized to address those limitations as outlined within this section are many. It has been assumed that the phenomenon of bullying was presented to a degree that is considered typical within the state of New Jersey. Similarly, the socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural information of the participating high school was examined to prevent the participation of any outlying groups. This information was verified via public record, as the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) keeps specific and meticulous records (NJDOE, 2016).

The specific desire to study only high school educators also shifted focus to bullying behaviors as perpetrated and/or suffered by teens. The extensive body of current knowledge applies largely to the first eight years of education. Reasonable measures were taken to prevent confusing those issues that are more common for young children with those of high school students (Kann et al., 2014; Kann et al., 2016). It was important for this study to highlight these differences and close these knowledge gaps through the teacher interview process and subsequent compiling of data. This

consideration was necessary, as it was not appropriate to ask participants to conjecture, or use deductive reasoning, to determine the differences between the behaviors of students of different ages. They were to speak only of their known experiences.

Significance

Best practices in bullying prevention have been determined by the state of New Jersey within the ABR to include three major components. Firstly, the programs must offer a cause of ubiquitous vigilance through school-wide training, awareness, monitoring, and assessment measures. Secondly, a classroom level factor is required to reinforce school-wide policies. Here, teachers work to build relationships and improve student social skills, thus instilling empathy and trust within the student body. Finally, a structured intervention section is offered for those students who are considered the perpetrators or targets of HIB behaviors (Cerf, Hespe, Gantwerk, Martz, & Vermeire, 2011). Central to each of these measures is teacher involvement. No other stakeholder is burdened equally with the responsibility of ensuring the enforcement of the policy, as the teachers perform on the front line. It is fair to say that parents, administrators, and the board of education are also accountable for managing and preventing incidents of bullying, but at no time are their actions called to be as instant and persistent as those of educators.

My overall goal for this study was to explore the unique role played by high school teachers in addressing HIB in their schools. The findings lay the groundwork for widespread social change: the self-exploration conducted by the teachers in the study indicates the efficacy of their bully prevention/intervention training, and, in turn, its

implementation for the school district and all of its employees. The knowledge gained

from the completion of this research provides an opportunity for the schools' faculty and

staff to improve school climate, increase awareness, and refine existing HIB behavior

intervention techniques.

Research indicates that the most successful antibullying programs are based on

consistency and collaborative efforts throughout schools. Those schools that successfully

foster a culture of abiding respect and kindness prove to be the most effective at

preventing bullying behaviors (Low & Van Ryzin, 2014). These factors, directly related

to positive school climate, hinge heavily on the support and nurturing provided by

educators – are all contingent on the buy-in of the building's faculty and staff, thus

further strengthening the need for the reporting of this study's findings. It was necessary

to understand the perspective of teachers as they attempt to adhere to the ABR, noting

that their individual successes and failures are an indication of the projected capabilities

of their district's prevention policy.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of New Jersey's management of

harassment, intimidation, and bullying within its school systems. It is understood and

agreed upon by all that these negative behaviors represent an unhealthy and unproductive

element within the classroom. To standardize their handling, the state has implemented

the ABR, which outlines the expectations of both students and educators. Students are

expected to embrace tolerance, and the faculty, staff, and administration are charged with

enforcing this ideal. In simplest terms, should these educators not meet with the levels of

success outlined by the law, punitive damages are incurred (NJEA, 2010).   This outcome

represents a phenomenon that had yet to be to be studied from the perspective of high

school teachers. The research conducted here sought to find, understand, and offer

insights regarding future possibilities in the field of antibullying programming. In

Chapter 2, an in-depth look at the literature concerning bullying and the way it is

perceived and managed by educators is outlined.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Parents, students, teachers, administrators, and lawmakers are in agreement that the perpetration of harassment, bullying, and intimidation within schools is intolerable. The recent introduction of the ABR has addressed this issue by changing the roles and responsibilities for educators in New Jersey. Teachers are now tasked with representing the first line of defense against HIB behaviors (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012). I conducted this study to determine how teachers perceive their role in the classroom as they confront the notion that bullying exists, and is not abating (Yeager, 2015).

The observed disconnect between the abhorrence of the acts and the inability to effectively remove, minimize, or at least manage the behavior has been attributed to the utter lack of consensus concerning nearly every facet of bullying: why it happens, how intervention should take place, and what measures of prevention should be implemented. Siu's (2004) body of research affirms a shared responsibility among family, peers, and the school system when assessing the initiators and perpetrators of bullying. However unintentional, the pro-bullying stances taken by authority figures were determined to be the result of the lack of understanding of the motivations and driving behaviors of bullying. According to Siu, bullies, victims, and bystanders alike have yet to be introduced to the understanding that HIB behaviors are wrong.

Moving one step beyond Siu's (2004) study, Bauman and Hurley (2005) and Gomez-Garibello, Saykaly, Moore, and Talwar (2013) researched how adults' ability to recognize bullying and their willingness to intervene do not necessarily mean that the

problem will be controlled. Instead, it is just as probable that the prevention measures will be counterproductive. Yet, New Jersey state law has singled out teachers as the only stakeholder vulnerable to possible professional and financial damages for a failure to prevent bullying (NJDOE, 2016). This study has shed light on these vulnerabilities while determining the perceived role played by high school teachers as they protect their students from HIB-related incidents.

The intention of this chapter is to provide insight into the current literature concerning the many facets of school bullying. More specifically, the relationships between the current research, the need for future study, and the way in which this project intends to fill a gap within the existing literature will be discussed. First, the strategy for searching the research literature will be presented. Next, an explanation of the two theoretical foundations on which the study's findings will be structured will be presented. With the informational foundation in place, the remainder of the chapter will be dedicated to detailing the current research focused on the understanding of school-related HIB behaviors.

Literature Search Parameters

The concept of bullying is fast evolving, as both our understanding of the concept and the way in which students are perpetrating it is constantly changing (Veenstra et al., 2014). As a result, extensive searching and monitoring of academic databases for scholarly and peer reviewed information was required regularly. Searches were conducted using the following databases: PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Sage Publications, ProQuest, SocINDEX, and published dissertations. Those terms that were

part of the search criteria focused on the process of bullying, the relationships shared by

students and teachers, the thoughts and experiences of students and/or teachers during

bullying, and the implications of preventative measures. The intention was to capture

bullying as a process, maintaining focus on the psychological components at play while

also maintaining awareness of the larger ramification's of the actions. The search terms

that were utilized in varied combinations were the following: *bully, bullying, harassment,*

intimidation, HIB, teacher, educator, faculty, high school, teacher perception, student,

school climate, school policy, anti-bully, New Jersey, New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of

Rights Act, ABR, and *Chris Christie*.

The most generalized terms utilized to establish background and context within

the five databases were *bullying* and *teacher perception.* The intention was to establish

germane scholarship across the databases before delving into anything more specifically.

Ultimately, the research about high school educators found in New Jersey was exhausted,

as this population was the focus of my research.

Conceptual Foundation

Bullying does not happen in isolation. It moves beyond the obvious requirement

of more than one party being present to perpetrate the harassment, intimidation, or

bullying, to include the input of others. The bully, bully-victim, victim, or bystander's

influencing relationships, family, school and peers, general community, and larger

cultural norms are all present. Espelage and Swearer's (2004) social-ecological

framework contends that the social networks that directly form and shape an individual's

understanding of their role in society are what influence bullying behaviors. Darley and

Latané's (1968) *bystander theory* framework asserts that whether or not someone, in this case, a teacher, is willing to intercede in instances of HIB is contingent on their understanding of the situation and their role within the larger process of curtailing the negative behaviors. Collectively, these frameworks explain the psychological mechanisms at work during the perpetration and then the failed mitigation of systemic bullying within our schools.

The construction of the social-ecological framework requires overlaying interrelated systems of increasingly greater complexity. The central focus is the individual. As they function as the nexus of progressively larger systems, their understanding of society is shaped first by their familial relationships, then their interactions at school with peers, next their understanding of their role within the community, and finally their management of societal or cultural pressures (Espelage, et al., 2014). The individual exists as a product of the mutual interplay of these factors. They are found at the center of their unique social ecology, which ultimately governs the interpretation of all that they perceive as well as their behaviors.

Espelage and Swearer (2004) have tailored the concept of social ecology to apply specifically to bullying. They have identified ways in which harassment, intimidation, and bullying behaviors may be perpetrated by uncovering those motivations and justifications that are most likely to apply to the individuals involved. The roles of bully, victim, and/or bystander are identified within the first or individual level. Here, personal and unique factors may function to influence the likelihood of becoming a victim or perpetrator in the future. Examples are identified as age, gender, stress level, or history

of violence (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). This information has been independently

substantiated using the Centers for Disease Control's most recent Youth Risk Behavior

Surveillance Report (Kann et al., 2016). It has indicated that violence in schools

nationwide occurs nearly twice as often between males as it does with females, with

28.42% of the male population engaging in physical altercations compared to only 16.5%

of female students within a one year period (Kann et al., 2016). On average, 5.6% of the

student population misses at least one day of school per month due to safety concerns

(Kann et al., 2016). As potential victims, this population of absentee students is more

likely to be female than male, more likely to be Hispanic than Caucasian or Black, more

likely to be Black than Caucasian, and more likely to be a high school freshman than a

senior (Kann et al., 2016).

The family functions as the framework's second relational level. Here, the roles

of bully, victim, and/or bystander are observed to exist within the familial structure.

Tolerating sibling bullying or allowing children to bully or be victimized models a level

of acceptance that may influence the development of bullying behaviors. In a study

completed by Papadaki and Giovazolias (2015), family dysfunction manifesting from low

parent involvement or perceived rejection was a significant predictor of depression,

anxiety, and/or peer rejection. As bullies have been found to display greater aggression

and anti-social behavior at school (Gini, 2008; Olweus, 1995), this study's findings

concluded that children with healthy parental bonds, especially with fathers when their

mothers were not present, were less likely to exhibit bullying behavior (Papadaki &

Giovazolias, 2015).

The third relational continuum as outlined by Espelage and Swearer (2004), may inadvertently provide a pro-bully atmosphere. This results when peers and classmates exhibit HIB-related behaviors and the school lacks the infrastructure to curtail it. An inadvertent message is sent where the lack of response is interpreted as tacit approval. The resulting climate degrades to become one of apparent apathy where peer groups support bullying behaviors. Whereas the intention is to prevent bullying through education and policy change, the programs are not impactful on school climate – leaving social norms untouched and true structural change impossible. A meta-analytical evaluation of intervention research conducted by Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, and Isava (2008) drew very similar conclusions. They compiled data from 16 studies over a period of 25 years, specifically 1980 through 2004, with 15,386 kindergarten through twelfth-grade students. They found that the dual application of school policies and bullying prevention curriculum yielded negligible favorable results. Specifically, the information gathered revealed that school intervention programs are likely to influence children moderately by positively improving their bullying-related knowledge, attitudes, and self-perceptions. However, these newfound sensitivities have shown no significant link with behaviors, as the introduction of prevention programs have shown no relationship with the amount of reported schoolwide bullying (Merrell et al., 2008).

Extending further to the community, exploring settings such as neighborhoods, workplaces, community centers, and schools, this fourth relational level for the individual provides everything from purposeful activities to recreation (Espelage et al., 2014). Unfair practices and intolerance enacted or simply permitted during activities condone

bullying behavior, possibly influencing future similar behaviors. In their research, Low and Van Ryzin (2014) sought to uniquely single out school climate as a predictor for bullying prevention. Here, the focus was placed on the role that community, culture, and everyday organizational well-being plays on the implementation of a reliable and vetted antibullying program. The study concluded that introducing and maintaining positive student values, reinforcing appropriate social interaction, and providing uniform and consistent treatment fostered an environment that promoted academic achievement while deterring negative behaviors. Bullying prevention programs find greater success in schools where there is a stable and healthy school climate (Low & Van Ryzin, 2014).

Finally, the larger picture of the framework is viewed clearly when societal and cultural norms are applied within the fifth level of Espelage and Swearer's (2004) framework. Here, all influences in a person's life are significant and influential. Those beliefs and practiced traditions considered common practice by the masses have the ability to support or inhibit participation in aggressive behaviors, thus influencing the individual's tendency toward bullying. Homophobic bullying functions as an excellent example of societally motivated behavior. Hong and Garbarino (2012) found that 90% of those youth who identify with a sexual minority have reported being verbally harassed. Similarly, students who do not identify as being heterosexual miss three times as much school as their classmates due to harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence (Kann et al., 2016). The pervasive nature of this inappropriate behavior has allowed homophobia to become normalized, thus embedded within the culture and social structure. According to Hong and Garbarino, this circumstance does not make ending the

cycle of homophobic bullying an impossibility. Instead, it just makes it more difficult as efforts must be made at all levels: the individual, peer groups, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members must establish an appropriate cultural norm that must be woven into the larger social-ecological structure.

The concept of social networks on which the social-ecological framework was built is credited to Bronfenbrenner (1977). Espelage and Swearer (2004) have explicated levels and environments for interaction, each based on the fundamental properties of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework. The original model was built using four interrelated systems that are responsible for a child's behavior in relation to bullying: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

Much like within the social-ecological framework, the child is the central figure common to the interplay of the four systems. The microsystem represents those immediate interactions the individual shares with one familiar, trusted, and specific group, such as home, the classroom, or daycare. Here, the reactions of others to bullying behaviors directly impact their understanding and willingness to perpetrate HIB-related behaviors. Similarly, their social environment dictates how they will react as bystanders. The mesosystem juxtaposes two or more environments for the child, such as home and school. They must reconcile the differences in policy regarding bullying behavior at this point. The exosystem does not have a direct impact on the child, but rather a trickle down effect. Here, rules, practices, and events have the potential to influence socialization, thoughts, and motivations toward bullying, although immediate exposure to the process is never experienced. The child did not create the antibullying policy at their

school, but they will be disciplined if they violate it. Finally, the macrosystem functions as the filter or lens through which all future experiences will be interpreted. Social mores and cultural context are applied to day-to-day situations, allowing the individual to gauge their understanding of normal (Bronfenbrenner's, 1977; Bronfenbrenner's, 1986).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) four levels of generalized relationships and social interactions have been distilled and strategically organized into discrete relationships within Espelage and Swearer's (2004) model. Bronfenbrenner has established the continuum on which bullying behaviors are perceived and accepted by the individual, yet Espelage and Swearer have shifted the focus to highlight the significance of the relationships shared by the individual. While each of these presents as a logistically sound framework, the social-ecological model better lends itself to understanding the role played by teachers within the bullying process.

This study sought to determine the role played by high school teachers in student-to-student bullying. Utilizing Espelage and Swearer's (2004) social-ecological framework allowed the phenomenon to be carefully examined and more thoroughly understood. There is a need to both understand the motivation of the students and the impact of the educators as they seek to curtail the negative behaviors. This framework provided the flexibility necessary to view each sub-system as its own entity, as the motivations and responses of bullies, victims, and bystanders must not be combined or generalized. Understanding what uniquely motivates bullying within a fixed environment allowed for the sources of aggression to be identified, processed, and prevented, thus allowing every participant's experience to be better understood. The

underlying intention was to utilize this framework to implement prevention programs with more substantial results, thus allowing teachers to meet with greater success as the first line of defense against bullying (Swearer & Espelage, 2012).

The teacher plays a vital role in student-to-student bullying because they function as the bystander most capable of providing help. When they do not intercede, Darley and Latané (1968) contend in their framework that it is not as a result of malicious intent, but rather because the situation fails to meet one of the five criteria outlined in the steps necessary for bystander action during an emergency. The bystander, as a potential helper, must 1) focus attention and notice that an event is taking place, 2) determine without ambiguity that help is genuinely needed within the situation, 3) assume personal responsibility for bringing help to the injured party/parties, 4) determine a course of action to be taken, and 5) bring about the intervention.

This framework was not specifically designed to represent instances of harassment, intimidation, and bullying in schools, and it must be modified to represent teachers and/or administrators and students accordingly. The teacher or administrator must (a) identify that HIB behaviors are taking place, (b) interpret the situation as one that must be addressed, (c) take responsibility for managing the problem, (d) utilize the provided school trainings as well as school policy to determine how to properly take action against the bullying, and (e) intercede to report and/or ultimately stop the behavior.

School bullying has been called an international public health problem (Gini, 2008), and yet it persists. A solution is presented to educators in the form of the completion of Darley and Latané's (1968) five steps, but research indicates that this

method presents as deceptively simple. Bradshaw, Sawyer, and O'Brennan (2007) have completed the most extensive study on the failed achievement of the first step, the inability to initially recognize the presence of the negative behaviors. The survey was district wide, reaching 15,185 students, and 1,547 faculty and staff within 14 high schools, 20 middle schools, and 75 elementary schools. The results found that over 40.6% of students indicated being bullied by other students frequently, or more than twice within the month prior to taking the survey. However, 71.4% of the faculty and staff believed that only 15% of their population met these criteria (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007). This marks a vast discrepancy between the presence and identification of negative behaviors within a school system.

The framework's second step requires properly identifying the situation as one that necessitates intervention. Research indicates that despite generally low teacher victimization identification rates, primary or elementary educators are the most adept at properly recognizing the negative bullying behaviors in their students. Leff and Kupersmidt (1999) attributed this observation to the amount of time spent with the students. Middle school teachers were found to spend only one class period, usually less than an hour, with each student group.   Primary school teachers spend the bulk of the day with their students, allowing them the opportunity to sample a range of behaviors. The results determined that teachers were able to identify 47% of primary school bullies but only 22% of the bullies found in middle school (Leff & Kupersmidt, 1999). HIB situations may go unnoticed, not as a result of a teacher's blind eye, but rather because of reduced or smaller structured periods of contact with students.

Taking responsibility for managing the problem, or step three, presupposes that the teacher believes himself or herself to be fundamentally capable of resolving the situation. Bradshaw, Sawyer, and O'Brennan's (2007) research uncovered that during stand-alone incidents when high school teachers witness aggression, they will directly intervene 60.6% of the time. That number, however, plummets to 28.3% of the time when the behavior was, instead, only reported by a student and not directly witnessed. That is not to say the situation was ignored, but rather, that the responsibility of responding was reassigned to guidance counselors, school psychologists, the administration, or the involved parties' parents (Bradshaw et al., 2007). A similar effect was found in a study conducted by Skinner, Babinski, and Gifford (2014), in which the teachers sampled were asked to identify their perceived efficacy for resolving bullying situations. They found that those educators who feel that they lack skills to improve the situation often ignore it, despite recognizing the damage being done. The reverse was also found to be true: higher levels of reported self-efficacy correlated to improved classroom structure and climate with fewer incidents of violence (Skinner et al., 2014).

The fourth step within the framework requires the bystander to actively develop a plan of intervention for the observed event. Traditionally in the school setting, this element involves following a set protocol rather than spontaneously developing one for each peer-to-peer bullying event. There are many existing programs, and some school systems elect to develop their own as an amalgamation of what they believe to be the most significant or appropriate portions of each program to service their population (Bradshaw, 2015). In a meta-analysis conducted by Ttofi and Farrington (2011), school-

based prevention programs designed to reduce bullying for all grade levels (K-12) for a span of 26 years were examined internationally. The core elements common to effective programs were listed as effective collaborative supervision strategies, consistent student discipline, effective classroom management skills, extensive schoolwide training and rules concerning bullying prevention and intervention, and parent/guardian involvement in the school's initiatives (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Effectively, the commitment to combat HIB behaviors must be complete, and it must be felt by the community in its entirety for the implementation of the intervention to meet with any level of success.

Finally, the fifth step outlined by Darley and Latané (1968) requires action. The educator is called upon to intercede and halt the disruptive and often violent behavior. This step is typically viewed as the most significant part of the process, as it requires outward mobilization: putting unwavering action to carefully calculated thoughts (Darley & Latané, 1968). Research by Bauman and Hurley (2005), however, found that 89% of the 96 teachers surveyed believed intervening during bullying situations was part of their job. This survey was completed by teachers of Grades 3-5 in the United States, and 80% of the sample believed that they were capable of identifying and handling bullying behaviors. Interestingly, only 19% of the teachers felt that any provided trainings had been helpful in improving their perceived efficacy levels, and 61% of the sample requested further learning opportunities (Bauman & Hurley, 2005).

The concept of bystander intervention was first studied by Darley and Latané in 1968, four years after the murder of Kitty Genovese. At the time, in 1964, it was believed that Genovese was murdered outside her apartment building in Queens, New

York, over a period of 35 minutes while 38 different people in the surrounding area were aware of her dire circumstances but did not intervene. This tragedy became a point of fascination for many, especially social psychologists Darley and Latané, thus inspiring their initial study of the role of bystanders in emergency situations (Darley & Latané, 1968).

It is noteworthy that scholarly debate exists as to whether or not including the Kitty Genovese story in the social psychology of helping is academically sound. What was once considered a factual account is now more accurately called a parable. A thorough investigation has found that it is not accurate to describe the 38 witnesses as disaffected and unwilling to help (Manning, Levine, & Collins, 2007). In many instances, decisive action was taken, none of which met with enough success to function as a life-saving measure. Regardless, Genovese's murder functioned as the impetus for Darley and Latané's seminal research within the then-budding field of helping research (Manning, Levine, & Collins, 2008).

As the bystander credited for being the most responsible for the well-being and safety of school children, the teacher became the central focus of this study. Roberts (2011) gauged the perceptions of 78 teachers concerning the effectiveness of their bullying interventions via a 26-question survey. She anonymously surveyed all grade level educators and students (K-12) throughout her sample area in North East and West England. The findings indicated that among the 18 different antibullying interventions that were offered, educators tended to favor those programs implemented by non-teaching staff while students tended to prefer those interventions offered by their

teachers. This difference was not an indication of a failure to act on the part of the teachers, but rather the data suggests an ill-fitting response to the perceived problem (Roberts, 2011).

This pattern is commonly found within bullying prevention research, and it has been referenced often as the primary source of program failure. Students indicate that they are less likely to participate in those interventions that they do not believe in (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Merril et al., 2008; Polanin et al., 2012). While great effort is taken on the part of the teacher to complete Darley and Latané's (1968) framework, the desired action is not always attained, allowing the HIB behaviors to persist. It was, therefore, necessary to examine the concept of bullying and the role(s) played by teachers using not only Darley and Latané's *bystander theory* framework, but also Espelage and Swearer's (2004) social ecological framework.

Bullying is a complex issue that is influenced by social, emotional, physical, institutional, and community based factors. The most visible display of these interactions is the perpetration of harassment, intimidation, and bullying, but when a closer look is taken, the precipitating and motivating events are far less obvious or blatant. Espelage and Swearer's (2004) social ecological framework seeks to pinpoint the environmental and sociocultural issues responsible for the HIB behaviors while Darley and Latané's (1968) *bystander theory* framework delves into the participant's motivations for action versus inaction. Together, these theories extensively cover those layers that live deep below the physical perpetration of negative behavior. Their collective application has shed light on the lived experience of New Jersey's high school teachers, as this study

sought to understand their roles on the front line as defenders against instances of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. The challenges and needs of these educators, whether individually motivated or systemically incurred, were viewed through these frameworks, with the intention of bringing clarity to what was a gap in knowledge.

Literature Review

The studies reviewed here shed light on the processes of bullying, harassment, and intimidation and the resultant impacts sustained by the individual, family, school, and community from these actions. The history of both the study and the understanding of these behaviors are first discussed. With basic terminology in place, those studies that focus on the roles of the participants, especially educators as bystanders, were examined. This analysis laid the groundwork for assessing the viability of those who have focused on intervention and prevention programming. Finally, those studies that have examined the impact of antibullying legislation were evaluated.

Bullying: A Brief History

The process or concept of bullying can be distilled into its most basic components. A negative action, whether overt or discrete, takes place, and the parties involved are labeled as aggressors, victims, and/or bystanders (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). The vast body of research dating back as far as the 1970s originally found the term bullying to be defined as repeated victimization where an imbalance of power exists (Olweus, 1995 & 2003). Olweus initiated bullying studies, and researchers since have spent fifty years studying the phenomenon. A consensus still

remains elusive regarding a resolute definition, though. There are variations and subtleties that exist, and they are constantly subject to change as cultural and societal norms evolve. The ubiquity of technology, for example, has led to the introduction of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Greater understanding of social nuances has led to the classification of three distinct types of bullying: physical bullying, verbal bullying, and relational bullying (Berger, 2007). Very often, relational bullying is further divided into three distinct categories: intimidation, exclusion, and social alienation. Each is a socially motivated and uniquely effective method of bullying (Roberts, 2011). Similarly, the specific nuances associated with the functions of the aggressors, victims, and bystanders have created subcategories of each, allowing for a more intricate understanding of aggressors who have been victimized, bystanders who intervene and defend victims, and those individuals who are not able to recognize bullying behaviors when they take place (Espelage, Rao, & De La Rao, 2013).

Olweus (2003) first looked to schools in Norway in 1973 to observe the relationship between bullies and victims. Ten years later in 1983, he returned there to perform the first comprehensive scientific study of the relationship shared between bullies and victims. He circulated a survey to 150,000 Scandinavian students and found that 15% of pupils between the ages of 8 and 16 years experienced bullying regularly, with 9% representing the victims and 6% participating as the bullies. This same survey was distributed to 1,100 students in 2001. The number of students exposed to bullying increased by 50%, and the frequency of these occurrences jumped by 65%. Though now considered an antiquated study, Olweus's findings are significant because they function

as a comprehensive tracking of the prevalence of bullying over time (Olweus, 2003) that

is still observed today (Low & Van Ryzin, 2014). These results, as they indicate that

bullying has been a growing issue since the first time it was studied, shed light on my

study. Educators have been made responsible at the state level for curtailing these

negative behaviors, but all evidence-based practices indicate that these teachers will fail.

Olweus is also credited with pioneering the first intervention-based program,

which later became known as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. His was a

system designed for implementation on the schoolwide level. The intention was to

involve the entire student population as well as the faculty and administration. Olweus

intended to create structural and social change while never singling out any preexisting

groups as significantly more responsible for the inappropriate activities (Ferguson, San

Miguel, Kilburn, & Sanchez, 2007).

A meta-analysis conducted by Smith, Schneider, Smith, and Ananiadou (2004)

found it difficult to point to significant levels of measured success when implementing

Olweus's system. This outcome was both a result of a lack of clinical significance in the

reduction of HIB behaviors and a failure to maintain rigor concerning the entirety of the

study. Of the 241 studies originally considered, only 14 were found to be

methodologically sound throughout and, therefore, available for inclusion in this meta-

study. In some of these 14 cases, a negative effect size was observed, but the increase in

bullying was mostly attributed to a generalized greater awareness of the presence of the

behavior. As a result, the researchers offered only the most cautious of recommendations

for schoolwide Olweus System implementation (Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou (2004).

As the groundbreaking researcher of this problematic behavior, Olweus's has become the predominant definition for all harassment, intimidation, and bullying associated terminology. It is for this reason that HIB behaviors as they are studied today continue to be viewed through the same lens that Olweus originally established. This circumstance is both favorable and unfavorable, as it offers a vast foundation of information to build upon from previous research, but also stifles the burgeoning of new theory. The stagnation of the field in this capacity is considered particularly detrimental when all the social and technological advancements are considered and the preventative and intervention measures are otherwise not keeping pace (Smith et al., 2004).

Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders

Harassment, intimidation, and bullying behaviors require at minimum an aggressor and a victim, but, within the school setting, it is far more common to encounter a group setting 85% to 88% of the time (Salmivalli, 2010). This applies to direct (or face-to-face encounters) and indirect (or what might be considered behind their back) attacks (Berger, 2007). Espelage, Rao, and De La Rao (2013) divided the participants of bullying into six categories of individuals and two major groups. They first distinguished the major participants as the bullies, bully-victims, and victims. The bullies function exclusively as the perpetrators, while the victims are strictly the recipients of the negative behaviors. The bully-victims, however, display both behaviors, as they are involved in at least one relationship in which they are the aggressor and one in which they are the

victim. Within the second group, there are those who are implicated in bullying as the bystanders, defenders, and uninvolved students. Bystanders are those who do not actively participate but observe the HIB behaviors; they function only as witnesses. Defenders are those individuals who actively seek to prevent and stop bullying when they encounter it. They choose to intervene on behalf of the victim(s). Finally, the uninvolved individuals are those who are unaware of bullying. Uninvolvement is the result of an inability to perceive the hostility or not being physically present at the time of these incidents (Espelage et al., 2013).

The research has shown that student peers typically function as bystanders. Their roles vary across the spectrum from stances of advocacy for the victim to encouragers of the bully. Unfortunately, studies have shown that children as onlookers are most likely to remain neutral or seek to offer praises to the aggressor (Smith et al., 2004). These bystanders are not necessarily in agreement with the bully; instead they are often simply looking to keep the focus from landing on themselves (Scarpaci, 2006). Often, these children do not believe they possess the problem-solving skills necessary to end the negative behavior, rendering them unable to help (Warden & Mackinnon, 2003). This perpetuates a positive feedback loop for bullies: they seek to continue the negative behavior because it gains them favor and attention from their peers (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010).

In their research, Robson and Witenberg (2013) encountered this synergistic phenomenon whereby the bully and inert bystander compound the impact of the bully-victim dyad alone. They studied 210 Australian students ages 12 through 15 years and

found that the most significant predictors for traditional bullying were moral disengagement, moral justifications, and the diffusion of responsibility. The self-identified bullies and passive bystanders typically viewed their conduct as socially acceptable and normal on the surveys. They also tended to justify their actions as preventing far worse transgressions from taking place, like their loss of social status. Similarly, they often noted that they were succumbing to the pressures of society and authority figures, allowing no blame to be identified as their own. This inability to take responsibility and the tendency to justify unacceptable behavior has been named by the researchers as the two enduring motivators for bullies and passive bystanders. There is no reason to change those behaviors that are not perceived as wrong (Robson & Witenberg, 2013).

Pozzoli and Gini (2012), in their most recent work, successfully utilized Darley and Latané's model to predict the coping responses for those participants who had witnessed bullying activity. This study was not conducted in a high school setting, making the research not ideal for the present study. It does, however, offer present day validation for the theoretical framework, warranting its inclusion. The study looked at the perceptions of bystanders concerning the perpetration of negative behaviors. The individual's emotional competence was assessed and used to predict whether they would passively observe the HIB behavior or actively defend the victim. It was determined that appropriate social-cognitive and emotional skills do not function as the only predictors of intervention. This indicates that empathy alone does not work to trigger intervention, as both passive observers and defenders shared these feelings, as they both know that help is

necessary. Defenders alone were found to have self-reported higher levels of self-efficacy in both interpersonal relationships and problem-solving skills (Pozzoli & Gini, 2012). These were the traits most readily associated with those steps in Darley and Latané's model that require taking responsibility for the situation and deciding how to help, further fortifying the validity of the original model. The defenders are most likely to graduate through each step while the passive bystander is unable to make substantial progress (Pozzoli & Gini, 2012).

Thornberg (2015), Sweden's leading bullying expert, completed a study of 350 students in which he was seeking to determine the degree to which high schoolers agreed with the justifications given for the perpetration of HIB acts by others. This information was then juxtaposed to the participant's self-reported roles in prior bullying situations as bullies, victims, or bystanders. The most common questionnaire response found bullies to be motivated by a desire for status or power. This sentiment was not associated with age, gender, or previous bullying exposure. It was a unilateral assumption made by 86% of the participants. Girls (81%) were more likely than boys (73%) to believe that the behavior of bullies is driven by psychosocial troubles (Thornberg, 2015). Those students that reported personal histories of bullying or reinforcing the actions of bullies were most likely to assign blame to the victim, subscribing to the odd victim explanation. Conversely, those students who identified as bystanders and defenders identified the distressed bully explanation as the motivation for the negative actions, resolving the victims of blame. The significance of this study is two-fold: it illuminates how students

explain bullying, and it indicates their motivations for interceding on behalf of their peers (Thornberg, 2015).

Credence is given to the explanations offered by students, as studies have shown that, overwhelmingly, those individuals who perpetrate HIB behaviors at school encounter them at home (Cook, et al., 2010; Limber 2003; Scarpaci, 2006; Smith et al., 2004; Ttofi & Farrington 2012).   It is believed that varied degrees of physical aggression are used as a means of expressing emotional discourse and general displeasure; it is also used as a form of problem solving for these children (Smith et al., 2004). They tend to use aggression and violence proactively rather than reactively. As these behaviors have been normalized, fighting often functions as a natural means of expression for these children. The ability to effectively utilize goal-directed aggression has led to a shift in understanding, as it was once believed that bullies were unable to articulate or maintain appropriate social context. It is now believed that the behavior is more nuanced, and violence is an active preference rather than a result of a lack of social skills (Salmivalli, 2010).

Papadaki and Giovazolias (2015) studied the role parental acceptance and rejection played on children and found a tremendous correlation between rejection, depressive behaviors, and bullying. Low parental involvement was a significant predictor of depression and problematic psychosocial development. The researchers found that the behaviors that manifest as a result of loneliness and generalized anxiety presented a higher risk factor for becoming bullies or victims. Conversely, paternal

acceptance, even in the face of maternal rejection, was the single greatest predictor for well-adjusted children, especially boys (Papadaki & Giovazolias, 2015).

The research also points to further issues with coping and decision making for bullies. Those who bully are observed to be more antisocial than their peers. They have a greater tendency to believe that actions such as theft, vandalism, violence, school truancy, and substance use/abuse are justifiable (Limber, 2003; Olweus, 1993; Ross & Horner, 2014). This means these students are more likely to carry weapons in school and also have substantially higher drop out rates. In Olweus's (1993) seminal research, middle school bullies were found to be four times more likely to have as many as three criminal convictions by age 24. This finding has been attributed to the associated tendency to externalize problems and possess a sustained level of aggression (Swearer et al., 2010).

The relationship shared between bullies and their victims is one filled with anxiety and, often, physical violence. Children who are frequently bullied have been found to struggle to maintain their academic standing. They are more likely than their peers to suffer lower grades, and their absenteeism rates are higher, due to their preoccupation with avoiding HIB situations (Limber 2003). These victims are more likely than their non-bullied counterparts to suffer psychosocial setbacks; they report feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, isolation, and friendlessness. There are also psychosocial health problems associated with bullies and victims. They are considered more likely to suffer from sleeping problems, tension, fatigue, and dizziness (Gini, 2008). Recent research has shown that the victims of bullying are not alone in their suffering.

Bystanders have been shown to exhibit greater levels of anxiety and depression also, as a combined result of watching the torment of their peers and fearing their imminent victimization (Polanin et al., 2012).

In his research, Cassidy (2009) found that those who are victimized by harassment, intimidation, and bullying tend to share several qualities or traits. He found the highest prevalence of victimization among those students who exhibited psychological distress, comparatively lower self-esteem, less support from their peers, teachers, and parents, lower perceived social identity, and poorer problem-solving abilities. The most serious cases of ill treatment revealed instances of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), indicating the seriousness of the tremendous damage possible to victims. Those children most distressed by bullying are those most likely to withdraw, thus perpetuating unhealthy behaviors and fortifying the downward spiraling nature of the increased attentions of the bully. With this general trend in mind, Cassidy identified social identity and group membership as the two most significant differences between bullies and victims. Those who are targeted suffer ostracism and social exclusion at the hands of their aggressor (Cassidy, 2009).

Many have played the role of the bully's victim, making research largely inconclusive when attempting to pinpoint any one particular group as being more prone to victimization. Students with disabilities – learning, physical, psychological, or otherwise – are often considered to be those most likely to be targeted, but the findings of the most significant studies do not concur. Woods and Wolke (2004) noted no significant difference between the victimization rates of students with and without disabilities while

Little (2002) found 94% of students with a disability reported experiencing some form of victimization. Bear et al. (2015), to account for the disparity in the data, observed the prevalence of victimization only after forming 10 discrete disability groups. They found emotionally disturbed children were most often targeted. They also noted that children with disabilities have a greater than average chance of being bullied.

It has been found that, over time, victimized students – especially those with disabilities – are more likely to develop aggressive tendencies as a means of coping. In an effort to combat their victimization, these children begin to embody the characteristics of their aggressors. As provocative victims, 15-42% of children with disabilities are likely to transition and become bullies themselves (Swearer et al., 2010).

Another group receiving a disproportionate amount of HIB behaviors are those students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), and other variations of sexuality. These students report experiencing physical violence, verbal bullying and harassment, stigmatization, and isolation. In their research, Kosciw and Diaz (2006) found 90% of LGBT students experienced verbal harassment. Among these students, 99.4% were referring to comments made by other students and 39.2% were referencing remarks made by the adults in the school. This body of research highlights the tragic disservice to those children, as it indicates that the behavior has been normalized – and the school climate suffers accordingly (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006).

Regardless of the role played, the research suggests that that bullies, victims, and bystanders are significantly more prone to both short and long-term negative outcomes than their peers. The academic and attendance issues surface immediately, but the socio-

emotional problems are embedded and lasting (Ross & Horner, 2014). The risks associated with allowing these relationships to persist have been deemed too great, requiring schools to take action via prevention and intervention programs.

Fox, Farrington, and Ttofi (2012) have tied school-aged bullying to criminal activity. The offenses occur an average of six years from the date the individual engages in HIB behaviors. Students who are bullied usually exhibit signs of depression seven years later. The most significant correlative relationship shown was between bullying and future violence – with no latent period noted. These findings speak loudly in favor of the implementation of preventive measures for both the present and future safety of children.

The concept of bullying does not belong to a specific culture or creed. It has been studied the world over. In his research, Şahin (2010) collected data on the weekly prevalence of bullying in various nations among schools representing students of all ages. Information concerning only student victimization was collected from Australia and Portugal and represented 30-50% and 20-22% of the school population respectively. More extensive data concerning the degree to which both victims and bullies were represented in school populations were noted throughout Europe and North America. In Europe, Italy found 8-40% of its students were victimized by 15-20% of the population. In Greece, 15-30% of the students were the victims of bullying as perpetrated by 6% of the school population. Finally, the data collected from England's schools noted that 4-36% of the students were bullied by 20% of the population. In North America, 21% of Canada's children were the victim of the bullying carried out by 12% of students, and the

United States found 10% of children were the victim of 13% of the total student body (Şahin, 2010). Whereas the researcher concedes that these values are subject to change with each study that has been conducted (as comparison and study methods vary), they still serve the larger purpose of indicating the ubiquitous nature of bullying on an international level. There exists a tremendous cultural component of influence concerning HIB behaviors, and this is evident through the extensive variation within the collected data (Şahin, 2010). It is also prudent to remember when juxtaposing international data that variations in language may result in translational differences that may bias responses (Berger, 2007).

A South African study conducted by Blake and Louw (2010) found that 40% of high school students experience HIB behaviors within the Western Cape Education Department School System. When the students were surveyed though, bullying was ranked lower than most other factors that interfered with their schoolwork. Among the most significant issues listed as problematic were disruptive classmates, feeling overwhelmed by the workload, teacher absenteeism, verbal fighting, being physically punished by teachers and administrators, and sexual violence. The inability to recognize bullying as an issue in the context of this survey has been interpreted as these behaviors being perceived as an unavoidable part of school. The students' inability to recognize bullying until it was specifically addressed and questioned demonstrates the normalizing of the aggression, a culturally significant finding (Blake and Louw, 2010). This indicator further substantiates the claim that data concerning bullying gathered at the international

level must be carefully scrutinized, as social and cultural factors are nowhere near standardized.

The Role of the Teacher

Teachers exist as a special subset of bystanders where bullying is concerned. It is their obligation to intervene and stop the behavior, yet research continues to point to the large-scale failure of what on the surface is a simple concept (Allen, 2010). Many teachers believe that they are implicitly deterring bullying through their school's policies and, therefore, avoid explicit management. Studies have shown, however, that these preventive measures are prone to fail because not all bullying involves violence, nor is it blatantly obvious to observers (Bradshaw et al., 2007). Instead, it is perpetrated over time within a relationship involving a power imbalance. These subtleties require school personnel to be tremendously aware and well trained. Otherwise, teachers are unwittingly – but, nonetheless, personally – guilty of allowing bullying as a result of systemic failure (Allen, 2010; Limber, 2003).

Bradshaw, Sawyer, and O'Brennan (2007) found that teachers of all levels and subject matters shared an underestimation for the level of perceived bullying as determined by their students. In a district-wide study in Maryland, 15,185 students and 1,547 staff were asked to outline their perceptions and experiences concerning bullying. School personnel were found to be particularly unaware of verbal and social bullying. This lapse was attributed to the transition from physical to social forms of aggression expressed by students as they progress from childhood to adolescence. The behavior becomes less overt, but no less hurtful or damaging. A positive correlation was found

between the likelihood of a negative childhood experience for the teacher and their perceived efficacy for handling HIB situations. Early personal exposure to bullying was credited as being the impetus for the ability to recognize the negative behavior as well as the motivation to intervene (Bradshaw et al., 2007).

In her research, Allen (2010) observed the relationship shared between bullying behaviors and classroom management. She noted that the way in which children were disciplined, the level of educational and emotional support available in the classroom, and the general expectations for daily behavior and procedures created a unique environment within each classroom that would either promote positive interaction or stifle it. Those teachers who can motivate and keep students engaged and excited about learning have a greater tendency to be proactive and positive, thus deterring bullying. Those students who support their classmates and are invested in each other's well-being are less likely to engage in isolating and negative behaviors. On the other hand, classrooms where actions are reactive and management strategies are punitively motivated foster an authoritative setting that models the very bullying behaviors it seeks to eliminate (Allen, 2010).

Research has found that teacher behaviors greatly influence bullying activity within the classroom (Scarpaci, 2006). When students have appropriate behaviors modeled for them, when their autonomy is respected, and when they are made to feel a sense of belonging, academic performance and social skills are said to flourish. The promotion of cause and effect thinking helps to solidify what is perceived to be right and wrong. This circumstance creates a particularly powerful set of responsibilities for

teachers, as they are tasked with not only presenting curriculum but also with life skills training. As bystanders to HIB behaviors, their action or inaction presents a lesson to each of their students, regardless of their intention (Scarpaci, 2006).

When HIB behaviors are met with punishment and exclusion, the research points to no noticeable decline in problem behavior. A failure to embrace proactive supports has resulted in greater long-term instances of aggression, violence, truancy, and dropping out. Effectively, when negativity begets more negativity, the issue is amplified not resolved (Ross & Horner, 2014). Not only are issues of bullying established and fortified, but so, too, are issues of poor morale and school climate.

In their research, Skinner, Babinski, and Gifford (2014) established that, if a district finds that they are experiencing tremendous negativity within their school climate, there is still hope. Teachers are not dissuaded to help by such barriers. Instead, they are encouraged by the motivation of a positive and strong administration. The study focused on 239 teachers who were asked to explore their perceptions of the most substantial factors that impact school bullying. They used case study vignettes to determine the perceived impact of school climate, high-risk student behaviors, administrative support, cooperation among teachers, and other perceived schoolwide barriers to learning. The strongest observable relationship was not climate dependent. Instead, it was noted between self-reported efficacy and advanced degrees. The study was unable to determine whether this was a correlative or causal relationship. The intervention skills could have been acquired within the graduate programs, or, perhaps, those individuals with greatest self-efficacy might be those who continue their education. It was simply concluded that

those teachers who felt best equipped to resolve HIB behaviors were those with the most extensive training. The teacher-principal dyad was also a significant factor for teachers tasked with intervening in bullying situations. Leadership that encourages personal and professional cooperation and consensus was rated as a very significant motivator. No other factors rated as substantial, as teachers were still willing to intervene despite student behavior, learning barriers, and a possible lack of cooperation among teachers (Skinner et al., 2014).

As noted in the research above, a teacher's willingness and ability to address bullying has been largely attributed to their confidence in their intervention skills as well as their attitudes toward HIB behaviors. In a study conducted by Bauman and Hurley (2005), 95 third through fifth-grade teachers were asked to note any disconnect between their responsibilities and their training. Among them, 89% believed that they were responsible for preventing bullying, but only 19% believed that they had received the proper training to handle adequately these situations through their teacher training; furthermore, only 17% believed that their districts had provided enough in-service opportunities. Yet surprisingly, 77% of these educators felt that they would be able to handle and diffuse bullying situations when they happen. The researchers note the disparity here between training and perceived efficacy and point to the likely nature that these teachers are probably not as effective as they believe themselves to be. They further note, without the necessary training that these teachers believe is needed, it is possible that pro-bully behaviors are inadvertently being established for these young children, despite the best of intentions (Bauman & Hurley, 2005). As these students

advance in their educational career, middle and high school teachers are then tasked with undoing these previously engrained, yet unacceptable, classroom norms.

Several years later, Bauman, Rigby, and Hoppa (2008) studied the techniques and strategies of bullying intervention for 735 high school teachers and guidance counselors. This project was a continuation of Bauman's (Bauman & Hurley, 2005) previous study that offered further insight into the modes of action taken by teachers, not just their feelings of efficacy. It is also noteworthy that this more comprehensive study was completed among high school rather than elementary school educators. They offered each participant the options of ignoring the HIB behaviors, providing discipline for the bully, referring the bully to the administration, working with the victim, and working with the bully to develop a more appropriate social skillset. Very few teachers and counselors would ignore the behavior (6%), and most preferred to enlist the help of the administrators (75%). A significant amount of variation was noted concerning the general willingness to work with the victims and/or bullies. The researchers attributed these findings not to an unwillingness to help, but rather to the personal uncertainty of each teacher or counselor in their ability to positively impact the situation. Ultimately, it was suggested that more opportunities for training be offered to the faculty and staff in hopes that good intentions might turn into actions.

The way in which interventions are structured also impacts the perceived role of the teacher in the classroom. In her study, Roberts (2011) assessed the way in which antibullying measures were implemented. In this English study, K-12 grade teachers whose careers varied in length from one to forty years, a mean length of 16.1 years, were

asked to select what they believed to be the most successful forms of individual antibullying interventions. Overwhelmingly, the teachers believed the nonteaching staff was the most effective at intervening. Specifically, guidance counselors were believed to have the largest active role in preventing bullying. These results are contrary to the opinions of the students, as they prefer their teachers handle these matters. As teachers attempt to acknowledge that they are not the most qualified to manage bullying related issues, classroom management is deleteriously impacted (Roberts, 2011). These findings are in stark contrast to those of Bauman, Rigby, and Hoppa (2008), as Roberts found admitting a lack of knowledge was no more helpful in improving school climate. The students are looking to the adult in the room to handle HIB behaviors; they are less confident in their teachers when those teachers are not directly responsible for intervention and future prevention.

Yoon, Sulkowski, and Bauman (2014) expanded the scope of teacher efficacy by introducing additional factors into their vignettes. The 236 participants were asked to observe instances of physical, verbal, and relational bullying. Their perceived efficacy, as well as their response to both the behaviors of the bullies and victims, was investigated in an effort to determine the significance of such relational variables as the type of bullying being perpetrated, the school climate, the students' genders and ethnicities, and the teacher's personal experiences with peer victimization. The study found that teachers were more likely to discipline those bullies who were physically violent than verbally or relationally bullying. When the physicality was removed, they were more likely to discipline verbal than relational bullying. Teachers also exhibited a greater willingness to

teach pro-social skills to victims versus bullies in instances of physical violence, but they felt more capable of working with bullies in instances of verbal and relational bullying. Teachers were also found to be most likely to discipline bullies of their same ethnicity. Advocacy for the victim was correlated to sharing the same gender. Those educators who were bullied as children were found to be less likely to reach out to help the victims, while those adults who reported being bystanders as children were the most likely to seek services for the victims. This research is significant because it teases apart the standard statement that bullies require discipline and victims need emotional support. As light is shed on those variables that drive intervention, greater efforts can be made to design prevention standards that address the gap found between efficacy and action (Yoon et al., 2014).

The tremendous difference in how bullying is defined must be considered when weighing the significance of opinions held by teachers and their students, as further inadvertent disconnect within the classroom is also possible for this reason. In a study completed by Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, de Bettencourt, and Lemme (2006), educators in the United Kingdom were found to have a more comprehensive understanding of bullying than students. They used less restrictive definitions of abuse, violence, and harm. It is noteworthy that the researchers saw the teachers as too narrow in their definition, as 25% of teachers failed to include name-calling, and 50% did not mention social exclusion. Children, on the other hand, were determined to recognize more obvious patterns of bullying. They identified violence and verbal actions, but failed to regularly recognize indirect but intentional aggression and power imbalance. Their

awareness increased with age, as ninth grade students were more likely to recognize psychological bullying than seventh graders. This fundamental difference in the way bullying is classified and understood has been highlighted by the researchers as a significant reason why prevention and intervention programs fail: they are maligned by students who cannot relate to the lessons found within the curriculum. They recommend both increasing student awareness and implementing measures that will allow teachers to empathize better with their pupils (Naylor et al., 2006).

The most comprehensive management and implementation of antibullying measures take place in the classroom. Teachers are tasked with establishing a learning environment that embraces acceptance and positivity. Students must feel engaged and challenged in a social structure that encourages a cohesive and caring approach to learning. The teacher must offer discipline that models proactive and positive social skills, allowing students to feel valued and never 'less than.' This teaching style demands an unfaltering level of dedication and vigilance, but most importantly, training. It cannot be expected that an educator is capable of developing a perfectly harmonious classroom without being introduced to prevention and intervention strategies that will be faithfully implemented (Allen, 2010).

Prevention and Intervention

Harassment, intimidation, and bullying behaviors have been associated with both immediately recognizable and long-term negative outcomes for bullies, victims, and bystanders. The desire to curtail these activities and prevent their reoccurrence is born from the notion that there are no positives associated with allowing HIB to continue

unabated (Cunningham, Cunningham, Ratcliffe, & Vaillancourt, 2010). As a result, the

negative conduct has been more regularly studied to design effective measures of

intervention.

Bullying can happen anywhere and can be perpetrated by anyone in any type of

relationship. Yet, schools remain the most commonly studied environment in which the

phenomenon is observed (Merrell et al., 2008). Researchers are able to sample the

population with ease by focusing on its children, as the school functions as a microcosm

of the community. The school environment showcases the local social and cultural

norms in a natural environment, ideal for studying (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

The concepts of intervention and prevention have been introduced to school

systems with vigor in response to the social justice concerns raised by the perpetration of

HIB behaviors. These programs vary in their general construction, theoretical framework,

instruction, intensity, duration, and implementation. There presently exists no accrediting

body to determine whether or not evidence-based practices are being utilized, if the

program meets the requested needs of the stakeholders, or if the program has a history of

meeting with success through rigorous evaluation measures designed to determine

efficacy (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Consequently, despite sincere school and

community efforts to promote change, a positive result may be impossible from the start

if the program itself is ineffective.

In a meta-analysis conducted by Ttofi and Farrington (2012), the outcomes of

specific antibullying programs were studied as they related to different age groups.

Regardless of the program, the youngest children were most impacted by the

interventions. Within the elementary schools, students self-reported fewer bullying incidents after the implementation of each program when compared to the older children. The most significant results were found in the elementary schools using the Ecological Anti-Bullying Program, the Respect Program, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, the Bully-Proofing Your School Program, and the Finnish Program. The older or high school level children yielded positive results using the Bully and Pupe program only. No measureable differences were noted within any age group when using the Transtheoretical Program or the Sheffield Program. The researchers attributed the stark contrast in age-related success to the tendency for older children to perpetrate the HIB behaviors. They also noted the ease with which data may be gathered from older children, thus only guaranteeing a truly representative sample at that age level (Ttofi & Farrington 2012).

In an effort to provide guidance to those schools seeking to implement antibullying measures, Ansary, Elias, Green, and Green (2015) juxtaposed four program exemplars: the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, The Seville study or SAVE model, the Sheffield Program, and KiVa. They utilized the meta-analytical data collected by Ttofi and Farrington's 2012 research and that of Craig, Pepler, Murphy, and McCuaig-Edge in 2010. This sampling ensured the use of rigorously conducted and measured data only, but, regretfully, it restricted the options to only four overlapping programs (Ansary et al., 2015). Each program was found to offer only neutral effect sizes in terms of reducing bullying. The Seville study was unique in that it measured a significant and beneficial impact concerning the reduction of victimization.

Although widely successful in Norway (as most of Olweus's programs are), the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program was not able to offer an equally impactful result in the United States. Researchers have attributed this shortcoming to the program's ineffective measures of implementation: it seeks to universally address bullying at the whole school level (Ansary et al., 2015; Ttofi & Farrington, 2012). The Seville study, or SAVE Model, focuses on character development and utilizes the students' various spheres of influence, including family, teachers, and peers. The program's greatest focus is on curricular activities and group work to promote change. The most significant antibullying materials are introduced directly by the teachers in the classroom. The success of this model is contingent on the support of the administration and driven by those teachers who provide relatable antibullying lessons (Ansary et al., 2015). The Sheffield Program is very similar to the one designed and implemented by Olweus. Differences include the centralized focus of peer-to-peer supports and an ability to augment the program to suit better the needs of the district. It is noteworthy that the same factors associated with the Olweus program's undoing were also found here, with the addition of complications associated with the heavy reliance on student cooperation and/or involvement (Ansary et al., 2015). Finally, the KiVa Anti-Bullying Program takes a unique approach, as it seeks to stop bullying behaviors by using the collective peer network instead of the individual relationships established in students' lives. This model intends to harness the power associated with working toward the greater good. The researchers have found this concept of group accountability to be embraced most readily by young children (Ansary et al., 2015).

On the whole, a meta-analysis of the implementation of prevention and intervention programs has yielded mostly non-significant outcomes (Ansary et al., 2015; Merrell et al., 2008). The exception is Ttofi and Farrington's 2011 work, where they completed the most comprehensive review of antibullying programming. They found, within the 53 studies that met with their control and experimental group requirements, a 20-23% decrease in bullying was observed with 17-20% less victimization in European schools. The most substantial improvements took place in the earliest grades, K-4, and were associated with the most intensive programs. The greatest success rates were found in programs that shared the common elements of parent involvement, firm but fair disciplinary methods, and improved supervision, especially on the playground (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

One year later, Ttofi and Farrington (2012) encountered an increase in negative behaviors when focusing their research on Grades 7-9. This observation further cemented the previous understanding that antibullying measures are most successful in the youngest grade levels. The 2012 research indicated that although these students felt no safer in the school environment, they were better equipped to identify and report their experiences after their antibullying training. These findings were significant, as they gave a possible indication of why programs fail for older children. It is not that improvements are not made; rather, the initial measures contained so much underreporting that the final results were not capable of overtaking the newly exposed, yet ever-present, gap (Ttofi & Farrington, 2012).

Statistically insignificant findings were gathered for HIB bystanders. A meta-analysis conducted by Polanin, Espelage, and Pigott (2012) sought to determine the effectiveness of utilizing bully prevention programming to increase the participation of student bystanders. Twelve school programs for students in grades kindergarten through twelfth were within the 11 quantitative studies sampled. The participant pool consisted of 12,874 students surveyed between the years 2000 and 2010. The researchers were seeking to determine the average treatment effect of the prevention programs, the largest treatment effect, and the impact treatment effect had on bystander empathy. It was determined that the introduction of prevention initiatives increased bystander intervention by 20% with greatest successes in the high school setting. There was, however, no discernable difference noted in bystander empathy. This meta-analysis also found that the programs met with greatest success were those implemented by a facilitator, not the teachers (Polanin et al., 2012). This information is significant as the present study examined the perceived role of teachers in school bullying situations including preventive measures.

Stakeholders seldom view prevention and intervention programs as successful because they are anticipating large-scale achievement. The programs are often expensive, and stock is placed in anecdotal evidence rather than research and scientifically gathered findings (Ferguson et al., 2007). The expectation is a drastic reduction in violence and aggression, but the result is often that the program provides information and exposes areas of vulnerability, both structurally and policy-related for school systems, without reducing HIB behaviors (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011; Merrill et al.,

2008). Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, and Isava (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 16

studies over a 24-year period and found that the modest positive outcomes of the

programs were overshadowed by the inert results of the unchanged number of bullying

incidents. The only significant changes observed were the levels of student and faculty

awareness concerning bullying knowledge, attitudes, and self-perceptions. In other

words, the aggression was not halted; instead, everyone was made aware that it was

happening and that it was unacceptable (Merrill et al., 2008).

In a study completed by Cunningham, Cunningham, Ratcliffe, and Vaillancourt

(2010), the architectural design of the studied building was found to be unsafe. There

were areas in which students were expected to travel to classrooms, yet no form of

monitoring was provided. Similarly, the supervision within this study was found to be

lacking often by design. Those students interested in perpetrating inappropriate behavior

in common areas outside the classroom would frequently devise a distraction as simple as

having a friend address and/or occupy the teacher (Cunningham et al., 2010).

Methods of prevention often require large-scale disruption to the existing school

system. Some of these measures include the following: offering activities during those

times when students en mass are considered unoccupied, increasing supervision in all

areas, introducing school uniforms to prevent exacerbating physical and monetary

differences, restructuring activities and events to include all children in an effort to

prevent isolation, introducing peer counseling in which younger students are mentored by

more mature students, teaching social skills to students, teaching similar skills to parents

(Cunningham et al., 2010), creating systems for peer mediation, introducing procedures

for responding to bullying into the curriculum, providing outside phone numbers to call to report bullying (Ttofi & Farrington 2012), motivating bystanders to seek involvement, and building a greater feeling of community for students (Limber, 2003). These activities, however helpful, defy the traditional cadence associated with following the curriculum. Additional time, resources, and finances must be devoted to these prevention measures which, however necessary, make change further unappealing to school systems (Ross & Horner, 2014).

It is not always the case that issues of bullying go unimproved because of an unwillingness to intervene. Research has shown that motivation to help may be present, but help still remains elusive because the means by which to offer assistance are unknown (Batson, 1975; Batson, 2016; Limber; 2003). Prevention is not possible without clearly outlined means of intervention. These methods are not intuitive; they must be taught to educators in the school setting.

Intervention measures require directly addressing the issues of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. Those techniques that have met with success include the following: offering a structured and clear definition of these unacceptable actions; staging antibullying announcements and/or presentations that are informative, engaging, and appropriately geared to the target audience; providing constant reminders where students can regularly access the information; constantly encouraging students to stand up to bullying as victims and bystanders alike; requesting the help of bystanders; developing a reliable program for reporting incidents; promoting supports for those individuals impacted by bullying behaviors; making the consequences imposed by the administration

for bullying significant for students; and keeping parents informed (Cunningham et al., 2010). The most significant instances of favorable program results are those that pair the above actions with a systemic program and student monitoring. Understanding what is working and which aspects require improvement via collected data further encourages program success (Smith et al., 2004).

In their research, Ross and Horner (2014) implemented a response to intervention, or RtI, component to the existing schoolwide intervention and prevention program in the form of a pilot study. Their intention was to address the three most significant issues with existent programming. They observed that too many resources, most significantly time and money, are required to bring large-scale intervention to the entire student body. Also, these interventions were too generalized and were not then able to provide specific skills training for different types of students in different levels of duress. Finally, they lacked any options for modification or system assessment to improve the buy-in of the administration, faculty, and staff. The study found that while RtI measures improved perceptions of assertiveness and bystander willingness to intervene, this impact depreciated with age as the oldest age group studied showed only marginal improvements. Ross and Horner attributed this trend to the natural increase of HIB behaviors as children advance through childhood. The introduction of social freedoms, puberty, and a loss of confidence in the administration to appropriately intervene and curtail peer-to-peer issues have also been noted as significant among middle school students (Berger, 2007; Cunningham et al., 2010; Limber 2003).

In her research, Duncan (2011) has found that when antibullying law and policy focuses only on punishment rather than restorative justice, the problem is often exacerbated. When children are given detentions, suspensions, and possible expulsions as blanket responses to perpetrating varying degrees of HIB behaviors, bullies are often left feeling as though future behaviors are justified. They feel victimized by the same power imbalance that they have perpetrated against others, and the danger associated with their status as a bully is compounded by their desire to be a provocative victim as well. Duncan advocates restorative justice because it seeks to nullify the bully's control while simultaneously restoring integrity to the victim. The intended results are repaired relationships, bully accountability, involvement for the victim, community-based support for the bully, and consensus-driven decision making when seeking justice (Duncan, 2011).

The most recent trends observed in the last five years have found that the prevention and intervention programs are less significant predictors of success. Instead, positive school climate has become the most reliable indicator of bullying and victimization reduction (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Low & Van Ryzin, 2014). In their research, Bosworth and Judkins (2014) define the character and quality of the school environment through a primarily academic lens. In those school systems where students believe their teachers care about them as individuals and about their learning, the fewest bullying behaviors are reported. This result has been attributed to the feeling of connectedness and the desire to present as a community. A pervasive feeling of support and inclusion is fostered, which functions as its own antibullying measure. Positive

school climate parallels prevention and intervention programs in many ways: they both seek to provide structure and support (usually within the entire school); they both highlight the significance of positive relationships; and they both use policies to develop norms that promote connection and safety (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014).

In their research, Low and Van Ryzin (2014) sought to determine whether or not positive school climate would influence the effectiveness of the Steps to Respect program. Specifically, they were looking for synergistically driven improvements. Their findings revealed a correlation between positive school climate and the program. This relationship was not determined to be causal; instead, it was largely attributed to common sense. Those students who felt safe, who felt a sense of belonging, were are less likely to succumb to HIB behaviors. The reverse was also true. As a synergistic relationship was only observed in one of the 33 schools studied, it was determined that positive psychosocial environments function to mediate the prevention and intervention programming (Low & Van Ryzin, 2014).

Positive school climate is initially established by defining disciplinary measures that are authoritative, not authoritarian. The traditional authoritarian approach emphasizes control and the extinguishing of undesired behaviors; here, there are no supports in place to offer long-term change. Instead, one behavior is substituted for another, and the problem changes in dynamic but remains equal in size. Authoritative discipline practices are different, in that they seek to offer rehabilitation in the place of punitive measures. Focus on support and structure allows for the consistent enforcement of more appropriate behaviors. Authoritatively based student-teacher relationships

regularly provide opportunities for both academic and social skill building, while authoritarian-driven relationships focus on the implementation of punitive damages (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014).

Gendron, Williams, and Guerra (2011) focused on school climate in a longitudinal study about bullying and self-esteem. They observed 7,299 students in Grades 5, 8, and 11 in 78 schools throughout Colorado for two years. They used school climate as a contextual predictor for the prevalence of bullying. They found that, in those schools where there exists structure and a greater understanding of the damaging interpersonal and social implications of bullying, fewer students were willing to be negative – because it was made clear that their actions were unfair and against pro-social norms. Conversely, when a lack of organization is found within the building, students use harassment, intimidation, and bullying as a means of gaining status, respect, and social currency. The inversely proportional relationship of school climate and self-esteem is driven by the need for approval, and school climate functions as the variable ultimately responsible for determining whether or not those students with high self-esteem will seek out positive or negative relationships to find validation (Gendron et al., 2011).

The Law

Each year, New Jersey's Legislature passes acts, which are then approved by the governor. These are called chapter laws. These laws are organized numerically in ascending order based on when they receive the governor's endorsement. The collection of chapter laws is officially referred to as pamphlet laws in New Jersey. New Jersey

Statutes Annotated (N.J.S.A.) Title 18A is the specific designation for education

regulations. The State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education are tasked

with implementing the educational law within the state of New Jersey (New Jersey Office

of Legislative Services, 2015). This process marks the very path taken by the ABR, the

central focus of this body of research. Its development and installation was not

immediate. Instead, its history was heavily influenced by national trends involving

violence and the determined need to improve school climate statewide.

It was not until the tragic events at Columbine High School in April of 1999 that

bullying became a media-driven, national concern. The macabre and senseless violence

was attributed to the teasing and bullying of the co-conspirators. In many schools, zero

tolerance policies became standard practice as a result (Allen, 2010). The state of New

Jersey enacted legislation in September of 2002, Pamphlet Law 2002, (Chapter 83

P.L.2002, c.83), requiring each of its schools to adopt a HIB policy, in an effort to

safeguard against further tragedy (A. 1874, 2002). At the time, it was considered one of

the most comprehensive and thorough laws in the nation (Perez-Peña, 2011). Only

Georgia and Connecticut were believed to have comparably detailed laws, as the law

provided guidance for school personnel in their classrooms and required the reporting of

HIB incidents at the state level (Sacco et al., 2012).

In 2007, a student in Toms River, New Jersey, transferred schools after being

severely harassed for his perceived sexual orientation. His family then filed suit against

the Toms River Regional Schools Board of Education and the case was eventually heard

before the New Jersey Supreme Court (L.W. et al. v. Toms River, 2012). Typically,

direct attempts for monetary damages are thwarted by sovereign or qualified immunity. Sovereign immunity is evoked in an effort to remove the potential of making the taxpayers shoulder the financial burden. Qualified immunity removes the liability of the contended actions by allowing the negative behavior to be permissible because it was not a willful violation of law. In these instances, the law has not yet been established and could not have intentionally been violated. It is noteworthy that neither sovereign nor qualified immunity is an admission of innocence or guilt, as they are both contingent on the perpetration of the initial action (Conn, 2004). Neither form of immunity was applied, leaving the Toms River school to be found at fault. The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that they had violated the Law Against Discrimination, or LAD. The school did not responsibly act to prevent the bias-based, student-on-student bullying and harassment that created the hostile educational environment for the plaintiff (L.W. et al. v. Toms River, 2012).

In response to this ruling, an amendment was made to New Jersey's HIB policy in 2008. The governor at that time, Jon Corzine, signed into law Pamphlet Law 2007, Chapter 303 (P.L.2007, c.303). The most significant portion of this law, Section 9, called for the development of a Commission on Bullying in Schools. Fourteen high-ranking individuals with expertise in education, civil liberties, state law, and the psychological implications of bullying in schools were tasked with assessing the existing law. They were to determine the weaknesses of the current strategies, the most effective way to implement reform, the adequacy of the legal protections available to stakeholders, and the appropriateness of the current training available to school personnel (A. 4591, 2007).

The Commission found tremendous areas of vulnerability, and legal and political wheels were set into motion to bring about policy change. Strong recommendations, a total of 22, were made in every area the fourteen were asked to examine. They titled their report *There Isn't a Moment to Lose: An Urgent Call for Legal Reform and Effective Practices to Combat Bullying in New Jersey Schools* (New Jersey Commission on Bullying, 2009) in an effort to express the dire need for change. In 2009, they recommended a broader and more comprehensive definition of HIB, greater support services for victims, more uniform implementation of training for intervention and prevention programming, standardized investigations, improvement to the understanding of diversity within school curriculum, school climate improvement committees or teams, the development and implementation of tutorials for parents and school personnel, and the allocation of state funds for bullying prevention (New Jersey Commission on Bullying).

In 2010, a culmination of the Commission's findings and the suicide of a Rutgers University freshman fueled a second wave of public indignation in New Jersey. Tyler Clementi, at only 18 years old, was victimized by his dormitory roommate, who posted to the Internet webcam footage of Clementi's intimate encounter with another man (Schwartz, 2010). Three days later in late September, Clementi posted the following status update to his Facebook page: "jumping off the gw bridge sorry" (as cited by Foderaro, 2010, p. 1). The following month, a new, more robust law was introduced, and, by November, the Legislature had approved the ABR (A. 3466, 2011).

The ABR Amendment of 2011, Pamphlet Law 2010, Chapter 122 (P.L.2010, c.122) was designed as a supplement to existing HIB legislation, specifically Pamphlet Law 2002, Chapter 83, Title 18A, Section 37-13 and what follows [P.L.2002, c.83 (C.18A:37-13 et seq.)]. It was signed by Governor Christopher "Chris" Christie in January of 2011 (A. 3466, 2011). In early 2012, an addendum was added, Pamphlet Law 2012, Chapter 1 (P.L.2012, c.1). This addition incorporated nonpublic schools and incidents taking place off school grounds. It also fortified the existing protections for the victims of bullying (A. 749, 2012). Collectively, these two enacted laws represent the present statutes by which New Jersey school systems implement antibullying measures.

The ABR changed a total of 13 statutes in an effort to strengthen the existing standards of preventing, reporting, investigating, and responding to instances of HIB behaviors both on and off school grounds. Harassment, intimidation, and bullying were defined more clearly, and they no longer required repeated incidences to qualify for punishment or treatment. Additions were made to broaden the definition of HIB to include those actions that create a hostile learning environment for others. Three new liaison roles were created for the faculty and staff to streamline the processes of reporting, managing, and ensuring safety where students and bullying are concerned. The Antibullying Coordinator is a district position, and they must accurately report HIB statistics to the state. The Antibullying Specialist must function as the primary school official responsible for preventing, identifying, and addressing HIB within their building. They are responsible for chairing the School Safety Team, and they must also function as the link between the faculty/staff and the Board of Education when the school policy is

annually reviewed. The School Safety Team is responsible for maintaining a positive school climate by reviewing all HIB complaints, determining whether or not patterns of HIB exist within the school, and finding ways to adjust the existing policy to accommodate improved school climate. This is no small task, as the team is also required to educate the community in preventing and addressing HIB behaviors within their municipality (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012).

The ABR required safeguards to be put into place for those individuals who feel victimized. This marked a shift from the original procedure, which called for students to be protected by those advocacy groups already established to prevent discrimination. Now, individualized supports must be developed on a case-by-case basis to ensure that the support and protections are tailored to each unique victim. When the language was changed in Section 37-14 to include "any other distinguishing characteristic" (A. 3466, 2011) as a catchall phrase for reasons an individual is the object of bullying, the perception of whether or not HIB behaviors were being perpetrated became the victim's decision to make. This change marked an intentional shift in power within the process of managing antibullying at the expense of making the terms harassment, intimidation, and bullying less concrete. In response to this, a standardized process for managing, reporting, and processing HIB incidents was outlined by the newest version of the law (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012).

The law requires every school in New Jersey to make students and their parents/guardians aware of the Code of Student Conduct. The policy includes a comprehensive outline for the procedures regarding harassment, intimidation, and

bullying, both on and off school grounds, and is careful to including cyberbullying. The expected behavior is made clear, establishing firm boundaries for student conduct as outlined in N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7. The consequences of violations are also required to be published as a part of the school's policy. This prevents any penalties or punishments for inappropriate behavior as being perceived as a surprise by students and their parents and/or guardians (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012).

To meet the requirements the New Jersey Legislature set for competent HIB behavior detection in schools, the law introduced compulsory training sessions for teachers, educational service providers, and educational leaders. Specifically, N.J.S.A. 18A:37-22(d) requires a minimum of two hours of professional development on the topics of HIB prevention and suicide prevention during each five-year cycle. The HIB presentation(s) must include the following: the legal definition of harassment, intimidation, and bullying; the behaviors associated with each from the perspective of bullies, victims, and bystanders; best practices in intervention and prevention; the identification and responses to cyberbullying; and the means by which additional state sanctioned resources can be accessed. The suicide prevention materials must offer current research on contributing factors and prevention measures, methods of warning sign detection, and best practices in suicide and HIB prevention and intervention. Reporting requirements are carefully outlined, and the consequences, both to staff and students, are explained (A. 3466, 2011).

The faculty and staff's ability to thoroughly understand HIB prevention and intervention is paramount, as the law requires them to initiate regular discussions and

provide character education for their students. During each school year, the first full week of October is designated as the 'Week of Respect,' and New Jersey's teachers are required to plan and implement a curriculum that highlights the school rules, character education, social skills, empathy, and the need to prevent HIB behaviors. The content must be age appropriate and should adhere to the class's core curriculum content standards as outlined in N.J.S.A. 18A:37-29. The general tone and content of the week is to be referenced throughout the school year, further fortifying the antibullying school climate for students (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012).

Despite the collective efforts of faculty and staff, violations of the Code of Student Conduct still take place. When this happens, when HIB behaviors are observed, the ABR has established a set procedure for reporting these actions. The school staff member who has been made aware of the incident must report their findings verbally on the same day, whether it is a direct observation or a second-hand report from students, to the administration. That same individual then has two days to submit formally their observations in writing to the administration. The principal or vice-principal must make the parents/guardians involved aware of the alleged incident. They may offer intervention services and counseling as appropriate to these families. The reported violation must then be promptly investigated in conjunction with the school antibullying specialist within one school day. This committee has as many as10days (but no more) to complete their investigation. If additional information is made available after the two-week period, addendums to the report are permitted. Two days after the report has been completed, the findings must be given to the superintendent, who must then present this

information to the Board of Education at the next formal meeting. The finalized report offered to the Board should include the findings of the investigation as well as the imposed discipline measures agreed upon by the administration, antibullying specialist, and superintendent. The parents/guardians of the involved parties, should they be unhappy with the findings of the investigation, may then request a hearing in front of the Board of Education. In executive session, the Board of Education may then affirm, modify, or reject the original findings of the report. Should they find cause, the parents/guardians may then file a complaint at the state level with the Division on Civil Rights (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012).

The updates to the law have streamlined the procedure for managing HIB incidents, extended protections for those who are fearful of retaliation from reporting, allowed provisions for anonymous contributions, and established consequences for students falsifying reports. The underlying intentions of fortifying and expediting the process of protecting students has been made clear throughout the updates and changes. An unintended consequence, however, has been to make those teachers on the frontline of detection and student protection more vulnerable. Section 4c of Pamphlet Law 2002, Chapter 83 was amended by Pamphlet Law 2010, Chapter 122 (C.18A:13-16) to read as follows:

A member of a board of education or a school employee who promptly reports an incident of harassment, intimidation or bullying, to the appropriate school official designated by the school district's policy, or to any school administrator or safe schools resource officer, and who makes this report in compliance with the

procedures in the district's policy, is immune from a cause of action for damages

arising from any failure to remedy the reported incident. (A. 3466, 2011)

This statement provides no distinguishable boundaries for the punishments associated

with a failure to notice and/or report HIB behaviors for school personnel. Instead, it

affirms only the immunity of those who comply with the law. This word choice is a

careful distinction from school administrators, as noted in Section 4d, as their failure to

notice HIB behaviors and/or act "may be subject to disciplinary action" (A. 3466, 2011).

Also noteworthy is Section 37-18 of the original law, which was left intact. It

reads, "This act shall not be interpreted to prevent a victim from seeking redress under

any other available law either civil or criminal. This act does not create or alter any tort

liability" (A. 1874, 2002). This provision does not encourage litigation, but it does make

clear the victim's right to seek damages should they believe them warranted. Thus, it

further underscores the skewing of entitlements to best empower the victimized party.

The unbalance of power as proportioned by the law presents as entirely

appropriate when viewing the victim in terms of their aggressor, but a closer look reveals

unintended consequences. Collateral damage presents as punishment for school

personnel because the law presupposes that the behaviors have been witnessed and have

gone unreported (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012). The possibility exists that the HIB

behaviors have taken place but have gone unobserved by faculty and staff. It is not

possible, however, to protect students and teachers in equal measure, establishing the

vulnerability of school personnel (Cerf et al., 2011).

Implications for the Present Study

Because there are many causes of HIB behaviors, there must be a proportional amount of prevention and intervention strategies (Olweus, 1993). A program touting one-size-fits-all approaches via comprehensive measures is destined for failure – because every community, school, classroom, and student experiences bullying differently (Limber, 2003). Allowances must be made for those factors that have met with success in the past to continue while changes are brought to those measures that are failing. Whereas this process seems fairly intuitive, both critically viewing current methods and implementing positive change have proven nearly impossible according to current research (Ansary et al., 2015). The greatest issues are associated with implementation, poor compliance with the model, and the inflexibility of the program to meet the specific needs of the population as they evolve (Bradshaw, 2015).

My study was tasked with conducting innovative research, as it is clear that antibullying programs are failing within our school systems (Ansary et al., 2015; Merrill 2008; Swearer et al., 2010; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Previous research has indicated that self-reported measures of bullying and victimization are used to determine behavioral modification. This approach has not proven to be an effective way of monitoring or measuring change: only greater awareness is achieved while poor student conduct continues (Ansary et al., 2015; Swearer et al., 2010). Although the evidence points to the contrary, the expectation exists that teachers will implement New Jersey's ABR to successfully deter bullying behaviors.

The intention of this research was to find guidance through the social-ecological framework. Most intervention studies indicate that programs lack room for expansion and improvement. There is a need to make intervention and prevention as pervasive and applicable as possible. The ability to view a teacher's understandings of HIB behaviors as they relate to the student, and apply this input to the child's peer groups, family, school, and community allowed for a more thorough understanding within their relationship (Swearer & Espelage, 2012). The intention was to work toward uncovering the optimal circumstance in which the teacher feels capable, the student feels safe, and HIB behaviors are eliminated from the classroom.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has summarized the major themes in the existing literature as they apply to harassment, intimidation, and bullying in the high school setting, while also highlighting the theoretical foundation on which the original research was conducted. Much is known about the effects of HIB behaviors, but their causes and associated processes still remain somewhat elusive. This observation is evidenced by the ubiquitous desire to end bullying in schools and the unfortunate inability to implement successful programming.

The intention of my study was to address the gap in the literature as it pertains to the teachers' perspectives of their role in HIB intervention and prevention. Significant study of the success and failure of these programs exists, but the unique situation of New Jersey's teachers, as they represent a group that may suffer punitive damages for program breakdown, had yet to be considered. Increasing understanding is intended to improve

the quality of these programs, which, in turn, will lead to positive social change within New Jersey's school system.

In Chapter 3, the methodology associated with this study will be carefully outlined. The means by which participants will be interviewed, and my role as the researcher will be detailed. The intention is to explain further the way this body of work has provided original and much-needed data to address the gap concerning the role New Jersey's teachers play as the frontline in state mandated antibullying intervention and prevention programming.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

When a crowd is scanned or the average room is entered, the presence of a bully will not be immediately apparent. Unfortunately, there is not a typical and enduring quality or characteristic that pinpoints those individuals who harass, intimidate, and/or bully (HIB) others. As vastly as the shape and size vary for those who bully, an equally surprising amount of difference may be found when identifying the victims and bystanders. It is for these reasons that there is a need for an increased understanding as to how bullying is being combated in our schools (Salmivalli, 2010). Specifically, this study was designed to understand the role that New Jersey high school educators play as they represent the front line of antibullying efforts. The legislative guidelines require teachers to curtail all bullying, present lessons in proper behavior and character growth, and maintain their general curriculum as outlined in the ABR (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012).

The intention of my study was to use a phenomenological approach to gather the perspectives of those who teach in New Jersey's high schools. Tremendous risks exist for faculty and staff who are unable to properly recognize and manage instances of harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB). A single failure to properly adhere to policy, for whatever reason, is a violation of state law, and that school employee is then vulnerable to suffer punitive damages or a loss of licensure (A. 3466, 2011).

When initially ratified, this law was heralded as the toughest antibullying law in the nation (Perez-Peña, 2011). The intention was to create safer schools. Three years

prior, in 2009, this recommendation was the most significant offering made by the Commission of Bullying in Schools. The belief was that the areas of vulnerability, both legally and politically, demanded change (New Jersey Commission on Bullying, 2009). A deeper understanding of the pervasive damages to the psyches of children as a result of HIB behaviors became the driving force for the amendment of the original bullying statute (Ansary et al., 2015). The rights of victims were strengthened and so, too, was the liability of educational personnel (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012; Berger, 2007). This potential vulnerability has not yet been studied, and the perspectives of high school teachers are still to be explored.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the research design of the study. The rationale for the chosen methodology will be detailed, as will the specific role I played as the researcher and instrument of data collection. Information concerning the selection of participants and the analysis of the interview content will also be featured. Finally, specifics relating to the ways in which trustworthiness and ethical procedures have maintained the integrity of the study will be a focal point.

Research Design and Rationale

The core phenomenon of interest for my study focuses on the relationship between teachers, students, and HIB procedures and how prepared high school teachers feel as they shoulder these responsibilities. The following questions were addressed:

1. What are the perceptions of New Jersey high school teachers regarding their role as the first line of defense against harassment, intimidation, and bullying?

2. What have been the individual challenges of New Jersey high school teachers since the implementation of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights?

3. What additional supports do New Jersey high school teachers perceive as necessary for fulfilling their role as the first line of defense against harassment, intimidation, and bullying?

A phenomenological approach was utilized to address this set of unique conditions as they apply to New Jersey's high school teachers. This approach is the most appropriate method of research as little is presently known by the academic and research communities concerning this particular topic (Tavallaei & Abu Talib, 2010). The concept of school bullying is familiar, as its study has been extensive (Olweus, 2003). The ABR, however, was ratified in 2011 and amended as recently as 2012 (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012), changing state law and educational implementation throughout the state. In situations such as these, where little is known, it is appropriate to gather information concerning the experiences, perspectives, attitudes, and life circumstances of those who are involved with the phenomenon (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2013). Extensive interviews provided understanding through in-depth commentary and reflection; this process determined meaning and resolved gaps in available literature.

Quantitative methods were not pursued as a viable form of research methodology. Developing and testing a hypothesis did not present as a feasible option for a phenomenon that is largely unknown (Tavallaei & Abu Talib, 2010). There are no instruments capable of quantitatively gathering the descriptive and interpretive information necessary to understand the experience being studied. Whereas quantitative

measures may present as a means of discovery in the future after the key aspects of the phenomenon have been named, it is not yet appropriate to do so and was, therefore, not considered as a means of information gathering (Creswell, 2013). Presently, only qualitative research designs are capable of allowing the researcher to advance the understanding of teachers' perceptions concerning their role as the first line of defense for the ABR in New Jersey. The intention of this study is to view and understand the phenomenon through the eyes of those who experience it (Patton, 2002).

Role of the Researcher

A phenomenological study requires data to be collected, analyzed, and interpreted. I functioned as the instrument of collection, and I met with participants to conduct one-on-one interviews. Here, I gathered all responses and tracked the research conditions, locations, and situations. I implemented all research procedures, insured the ethical treatment of participants, and the trustworthiness of the data. I did not share any personal or prior relationships with the participants; I excluded these people from participating. It is possible that we may have attended similar professional conferences because we teach in the same county of the same state, but this alone did not disqualify participants. Only genuine familiarity and previously shared experiences was cause to exclude participants (Creswell, 2009). Striving further to ensure unbiased and thorough responses from participants, I disclosed my role as a veteran biology teacher. As I do not hold the position of supervisor or administrator, participants and I are considered equally qualified within the classroom. As interviewer and participant, we varied in our years of

service and the subject matter we teach, but these were to be considered only differences and not possible sources of bias.

The accuracy of observational data is directly proportional to the skill level and general ability of the researcher to gather it (Janesick, 2011). For this reason, I must be capable of acknowledging my own biases in an effort to extract my perspective, which functions as a limiting force within my study (Patton, 2002). I monitored my potential for biases through bracketing and journaling.

As the father of phenomenological study, Husserl (2012) calls for an epoché to systematically bracket out pre-existing assumptions held by the researcher. This technique provides an unobstructed and bias-free view of the phenomenon as seen through the eyes of the participant (Husserl, 2012). I will apply this method in Chapter 5 to address my own background as a classroom teacher, my own experiences (personal and professional) with harassment, intimidation, and bullying, and any other factors that might lead to the biasing of my interpretation of data.

The additional use of reflective journaling ensured that objectivity was not compromised during the data collection and analysis process. The journal specifically focused on feelings, ideas, preconceived notions, impressions, and prejudices (Moustakas, 1994). Entries were written both before and after individual interviews were conducted in an effort to determine if bias had interfered with the interpretation of data. These writings were then regularly reviewed to determine whether or not an appropriate self-awareness was present. All prejudgments were suspended as much as possible in order to maintain the integrity of the study (Creswell, 2009).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The current body of knowledge concerning HIB behaviors in school systems, relating to the first eight years of education, is extensive (Kann et al., 2014; Kann et al., 2016). My desire was to focus on high school educators exclusively with this study. The intention was to fill a present a gap in knowledge by asking participants to share their lived and known experiences as they have adhered to the ABR in the state of New Jersey. They have been required by law to fulfill their roles as educators while serving as the first line of defense against bullying.

There are 482 high schools in New Jersey's 586 operating school districts (NJDOE, 2016). The NJDOE provides contact information for each of these schools in a directory where a link to the school's website can be found, as well as their mailing address and details on key building personnel. In most instances, the antibullying coordinator's information is provided. For those schools where these details are not immediately apparent, the ABR requires each school to list their HIB information directly on their school website (New Jersey ABR, 2010). The antibullying coordinator of each school was approached first. As the key contact person most able to facilitate data collection, this person's willingness to help was essential. When interest was expressed in my study, the written permission of the appropriate Board of Education, and the support of the district's education union were required and obtained before any further action took place. Possible participants were then identified, formally contacted, and recruited with the help of the antibullying coordinator.

There was a need to maximize the different perspectives gathered within my study, allowing the sample group to properly represent the overall population. The intention was to shed the most light and provide the greatest understanding concerning the phenomenon to be analyzed, namely, the role high school teachers' play as they adhere to antibullying legislation. To increase the likelihood of gathering an appropriate sample group, a criteria-based sampling strategy was used to collect an extensive amount of unique data from participants. Comprehensive one-on-one interviewing of 10-12 participants functioned as the most effective means of collecting the necessary data. The introduction of fewer contributors to the study risked reducing the full spectrum of opinion, but 12 individuals is considered appropriate for a qualitative study (Creswell, 2013).

Participation in the ABR is compulsory for all public educators (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012). For this reason, all presently employed high school level teachers approached for participation were qualified to address the first research question. They were able to knowledgeably speak to their role as they implement the law. My study's questions also seek to shed light on the challenges that have arisen since the implementation of the law and the additional services needed to overcome these issues. To thoroughly and appropriately answer these questions, the participants must be able to recall their teaching experiences prior to the ratification of the law. This circumstance requires all participants to have begun their teaching careers in New Jersey no later than 2010, the year before the Act was introduced (A. 3466, 2011).

It must be assumed that bullying is present in the participants' school system. The ABR requires New Jersey schools to disclose their HIB statistics (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012), and this information is a matter of public record via the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System. During the 2015-2016 school year, 19% of New Jersey's high schools reported no HIB incidents, 16% noted only 1, 31% had 2-4, 23% found 5-10, and 10% indicated more than 10 instances (NJDOE, 2017). Those schools with fewer than five experiences of reported harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying were not considered for study, as the national average indicates that 22.6% of students (28.4% for males and 16.5% for females) have been in one or more fight during that similar time frame (Kann et al., 2016).

Instrumentation

Data were collected from study participants during a one-on-one interview. The interview protocol (Appendix A) was designed by me to shed light on the study's three research questions using the social-ecological and *bystander theory* frameworks. The questions were derived from careful review of the existing literature and focused on those gaps that had yet to be addressed. They were further refined with the help of my dissertation committee. My intentions when designing the questions were to provide a semistructured environment in which the interviewee could voice their understanding of their lived experience of adhering to the ABR.

The general implementation of the interview process was semistructured in an effort to ensure that each research question was addressed in detail. This was carefully balanced with the need to allow participants to speak in a way that was natural to them

and free flowing, allowing me to capture as much information as possible (Moustakas, 1994). The tone of the initial interview was considered largely conversational, as the topics for discussion were framed as open-ended questions. They were designed to encourage interviewees to focus on those areas of the experience that they have found to be the most significant. The supplementary open-ended probe questions were crafted using the above-mentioned conceptual frameworks to complement the main questions in a way that provides further prompting when those aspects of understanding the phenomenon have not yet been addressed. I asked them only as necessary, in an effort to maintain the conversational tone of the interview.

Participants were asked to speak at length and the audio portion of their interviews were recorded, transcribed, and stored on a password-protected computer. Notes were also taken during the interview process allowing me to gather the nonverbal cues that could not be detected by the voice recorder. The specific nature and timing of this information, such as emotional expressions, were noted and paired with the participant's verbal statements. This allowed for the detection of discrepancies, as emotional and verbal cues were compared and contrasted as the data were analyzed.

Upon the conclusion of each interview, the participants were thanked for their participation and debriefed. This provided an opportunity to ask questions, discuss their thoughts, and voice their concerns. They were asked to schedule their follow up interview during which the data collected from the initial interview were discussed at length, and they were reminded that they may withdraw from the study at any time. They were also be reminded of the guarantees they were offered within the informed consent

document – these interviews were confidential, their identities will be protected beyond the research process, all the data gathered were securely managed in a password protected environment, and a printed copy of the transcript was provided so that they were confident that they were appropriately represented during the interview process.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Teachers in New Jersey are unionized and are employed by their district's Board of Education. Data could only be collected with the explicit permission of both entities (NJDOE, 2016). Before any and all educators were contacted to join my study, their union had to offer written permission and a representative of the Board of Education had to grant approval. With the appropriate authorizations in place, teachers who had been employed within that same district since at least 2010 were approached with the help of the school's antibullying coordinator for participation in the study. More than the requisite 10 to 12 individuals were initially asked to participate to prevent having fewer than the necessary number of respondents. After choosing from the applicant pool at random, the requisite sample number of interviews was satisfied and the additional volunteers were thanked and released from further participation.

Informed consent was given to each participant prior to any formal interviewing. As the collector of information, I reviewed this document with each participant to ensure his or her complete understanding of its content. The document carefully outlineed the intention of the study, the voice recorded one-on-one method of interviewing, the voluntary nature of their participation, entitlement to have personal identity protected, examples of questions that were asked during their interview, follow up interviews for

clarification and member checking, the lack of financial remuneration for their time, and all of the risks and benefits associated with the interview(s). Participants were informed that the interviews were to last approximately one hour, with a follow-up interview lasting 30-45 minutes. Upon the completion of the interviews, the informed consent guaranteed participants the summary of the content to ensure that the essence of their experiences and interpretations had been faithfully captured. Contact for correction and/or further discussion were welcomed.

Data Analysis Plan

The interview protocol (Appendix A) has been formatted into subgroups of questions to reflect the study's three research questions. Each subset was representative of a specific facet of the phenomenon being studied, which is the role high school teachers' play as they represent the front line of defense against HIB behaviors. The data were analyzed for contextual themes and key phrases. Clustering and comparing the actual dialog from the interviews verified emergent commonalities. Themes within the research were then anchored to the participants. It also helped to identify the origins of discrepancies. Differences or outliers were noted as they apply to singular situations or they were consistently attributed to specific individuals within the study. The data were given context by determining the levels of connection found among the themes so that the entire picture was visible and the information was faithfully interpreted (Moustakas, 1994).

Issues of Trustworthiness

The results of any research study are only useful if they are considered to be an accurate interpretation of the observed phenomenon. It is only through the faithful gathering, analysis, and interpretation of data that significant meaning can be attributed to those experiences (Seidman, 2013). The researcher cannot understand the lived experience of others if they cannot first ensure the trustworthiness of their data. These assurances are predicated on the maintenance of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability throughout a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility within a qualitative study is the relative equivalent to internal validity within a quantitative study. This is established by determining, to the greatest degree of certainty, that the information collected was accurate and the participants have been truthful. Credible findings reflect the exact reality of those who have experienced the phenomenon and nothing else (Morrow, 2005). This status was achieved within the study through the use of reflexive journaling, the collection of referential adequacy materials, and member checks. Reflexive journaling was used to maintain focus on the potential for researcher bias. Any form of prejudice or otherwise imposed information would have tainted the purity of the data as it has been expressed by the participants. Journaling heightened sensitivity to this possibility and allowed for the steadfast prevention of bias-based interpretation. Referential adequacy materials, such as audio recordings and other raw data, were collected and set aside. Later, after the completion of the analysis portion of the study, the untouched (not yet transcribed or coded) data were tested against the interpretations that were developed. The theories developed from

the research were maintained after evaluating the previously unused data, and the

interpretations were considered credible. This material verified the existence of the

study's assertions when the archived data matched the developed explanations (Guba,

1981). Member checks took place in follow-up interviews when participants were asked

to review the summary of their interviews. They offered feedback, shaping the way their

understanding of the phenomenon was understood. This process confirmed the accuracy

of the information and the understanding of the lived experience (Guba, 1981).

Transferability of information within a qualitative study is akin to external

validity within quantitative research. This means that the information gathered was

generalized and applied to other populations, not just the study's sample. As broader

meaning existed, the scope of the findings could be expanded. The boundaries of my

study were described in rich detail without researcher bias. Instances of inference reduce

the transferability of the data by assigning artificial context. To maximize the application

of this research to other settings and contexts, there were extensive and accurate details

provided concerning the study's setting and the sample of participants. This meant not

only faithfully transcribing the words of the interviewees, but also capturing all aspects of

the situation in which the information was gathered (Guba, 1981). These details included

the number of participants who participated, the data collection methods used, the

restrictions in the types of people who participated, the number of and length of the

interview sessions, the time period over which all the data were collected, and the thick

description or detailed accounts of the social and cultural relationships observed within

the schools studied (Shenton, 2004). Thorough detailing of the participant selection

process accounted for the way these sample individuals were chosen to represent the best means of gathering the data necessary to answer the study's research questions. The criteria used for the purposive non-probability sampling in this study required participants to have been teaching in the same New Jersey high school since 2010. Transparency concerning the selection process of these participants shed light on the transferability of the research as well as the inherent limitations of the study, despite its methodological rigor (Saunders, 2012).

A qualitative study is said to meet the criteria for dependability when there is evidence that the work can be replicated. This is the equivalent of reliability when conducting a quantitative study. It establishes consistency and stability within the observed system, which is then utilized to account for factors of instability and change (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A detailed trail was maintained to ensure the dependability of the gathering of data and triangulation accounted for its interpretation. All records of how raw data were obtained, documentation of how it was processed, and the products of data reduction were carefully outlined. The methodological process notes detailed the procedure for analysis and data synthesis. Equally important, the reflexive journal that corresponds to each step of the process was disclosed. The initial interview took place, transcripts of the experience were returned to participants and the process of member checking safeguarded against misinterpretation of the data. When the fidelity of the content was confirmed, collaboration with an outside evaluator provided a systematic review of the emergent themes. Their careful review of the audit trail and unique ability to identify meaning within the transcripts functioned as a means to identify instances in

which I might have shown bias, preventing my subjectivity. Additionally, feedback from the dissertation committee was requested in the form of a dependability audit. These experienced researchers were asked to comment on the degree to which the study's procedure was an acceptable and repeatable means of inquiry (Guba, 1981).

The collected data is considered to have confirmability when the quantitative counterpart of objectivity has been observed. Here, there is no evidence of bias or intrusion by the researcher's prejudices. Instead, the information gathered remains exclusively applicable to the participants. The data is authentic and coherent at all times because its integrity has been maintained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Practicing reflexivity through journaling was utilized to intentionally reveal any assumptions that have been presupposed. The motivation and orientation of the research were carefully monitored to ensure that introspections and opinions did not result in expectations that biased data analysis. This method of maintaining confirmability required the careful detailing of the study's methods. The audit trail provided a methodological description of the step-by-step decision making process as it was used to collect and interpret data. Here, information was carefully tracked, and the way it applied to the research questions was monitored for bias (Shenton, 2004).

Ethical Procedures

The moral and ethical rights of the participants were the utmost priority during the data collection phase of this study. New Jersey teachers are employed by their school's Board of Education and they are members of local and state level education unions. As a result, any form of teacher contribution to this study was contingent on the

formal approval of both of these entities at the site level before individual participants were initially contacted. This ensured that there was no threat to the professional and personal standing of those who choose to participate. The ethical guidelines established by the American Psychological Association (APA) (American Psychological Association, 2010) and the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) were carefully adhered to. Permission was first obtained from the IRB before gathering any data. Their approval further ensured that the existing plan met all the criteria for interacting with study participants.

The professional and legal standards utilized in the informed consent waiver (Appendix A) were detailed in plain terms. The participants were encouraged to address any concerns or areas of confusion before signing, to ensure their voluntary participation was completely understood and no undo burden was incurred. The interviewees understood through the informed consent process that if they had chosen to withdraw from the study before their interview was complete, they had the right to do so without prejudice (APA, 2010).

To ensure the protection of the data, only the researcher and dissertation committee members were granted access to the interview materials. The information, including audio files, the researcher's personal journal, all forms of analysis and related interpretations, and written drafts, has remained password protected. The raw data will be stored for five years on a password protected computer after the completion of the study, at which point it will be securely deleted from the hard drive. Participants were

given pseudonyms and will never be publicly identified as participants within this research.

Summary

A phenomenological approach has been chosen to address the way in which high school teachers perceive their roles as the front line defenders of New Jersey's ABR. In an effort to uphold the law, these individuals are responsible for presenting antibullying awareness, prevention, and intervention techniques and fostering an environment of tolerance (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012). The shared experiences of 10 to 12 individuals through face-to-face interviews were utilized to develop a collective understanding of their lived experience. This methodology presents as an ideal means of investigation, because little was known about how New Jersey's high school educators feel about the requirements of the policy and the liabilities and punishments associated with the failure to uphold it.

The results of these interviews will be discussed in detail throughout Chapter 4. The settings, demographic details of the participants, and data collection process will be outlined in detail to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. The interview information will then be analyzed, and the significant codes and themes will be discussed at length.

Chapter 4: Data Collection

Introduction

New Jersey high school teachers have many responsibilities to their students. They must educate them, work to mold their strength of character, and protect them from harm. The need to perform these tasks well is important to the emotional health of the children, which further compounds the complexities related to HIB issues (Cook et al., 2010). The wellbeing of both the students and faculty require consideration, as the educator's failure to properly uphold these rules is punishable by law, with damages ranging from financial implications to the loss of their teaching license (NJEA, 2010). The driving purpose of this research was the desire to understand what these teachers perceive to be their role as the front line defenders of the ABR.

A phenomenological approach addressed the unique responsibilities of high school educators. Semistructured interviews were conducted to address the core content of the study's three research questions: the participants explained the role they play as the first line of defense against harassment, intimidation, and bullying; they identified individual areas of challenge that have developed since the implementation of the law; and they spoke of additional supports that they perceive as necessary for fulfilling their legally defined roles.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the collection and analysis of the study's data. The three settings for the interviews will be explored as well as the general demographics of those areas. The physical process of collecting data and its coding and analysis will be reviewed in great detail. Evidence of the maintenance of trustworthiness,

as outlined in Chapter 3, will be discussed. Finally, the results determined from the collected data will be reviewed.

Setting

Three discrete locations reporting between the range of 5 and 15 instances of student-to-student harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying (HIB) were chosen for participant recruitment, maximizing the different perspectives gathered within this study. These locations allowed New Jersey's average educator to be best represented, as 2014-2015 found 30% of high schools documenting between 5 and 10 HIBs (NJDOE, 2015) and the 2015-2016 data indicated this represented 23% of schools (NJDOE, 2017). Nationally, 22.6% of high school students (28.4% for males and 16.5% for females) report participating in a fight during the school year (Kann et al., 2016). With the national average in mind, one location with more than ten reported HIBs was selected for participation.

To my knowledge, there were no major policy changes enacted in any of the participants' schools since the implementation of the ABR in 2011. Similarly, I am unaware of any personal circumstances that may have affected participants during our interviews. It is reasonable to conclude that by virtue of consenting to participate in my study, the participants were not experiencing personal or professional stressors that would have impacted their responses. As a result, these extenuating circumstances were omitted when interpreting the data.

It is noteworthy that staffing changes have taken place in the administrations of all three locations. These developments happened well after the required implementation

of the law in 2011, and they can be considered recent by comparison. The staffs'

implementation of the antibullying policies remained unchanged despite the differences

in leadership. Participants indicated no direct negative impact during data collection as a

result of these changes. Therefore, the transition of leadership within these three schools

was not considered when the data were interpreted.

Demographics

The interview sample consisted of nine women and three men employed within

three different school districts. The high schools each service student bodies exceeding

one thousand individuals (NJDOE, 2017). The interviews of three women and one man,

four per location in total, were conducted over the course of four months within one

school year. These individuals ranged in age from their twenties to their sixties, and were

licensed in the state of New Jersey to teach the subjects of mathematics, English, special

education, social studies, foreign language, and science. One person was enjoying his

second career within the school system, as he was previously in law enforcement. Their

teaching careers in New Jersey, where the ABR is presently enforced, collectively

average 14 years, specifically 11 years in location one, 13 years in location two, and 18

years in location three. To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, all identifying

information – including that of their high schools – has been omitted. Instead, a numeric

system identifies the three districts as well as the 12 individuals. These values were

assigned in ascending order based on when the participants and locations were

encountered.

Data Collection

Data were collected during the semistructured one-on-one interview of the 12 participants. The interview protocol was identical for each teacher. The sessions, however, varied in length from twenty minutes to as long as one hour; the average was 39 minutes. The variation in timeline was the result of the conversational nature and tone of the interaction, not the depth or breadth of the content covered. The interviews took place in neutral locations chosen by the participant. The settings were private, and there existed no unreasonable threat of being interrupted or overheard by bystanders.

No unusual circumstances or equipment failures were noted during the interview process, requiring no repetition of information or variation from the data collection plan offered in Chapter 3. Each interview began with the detailed review and signing of the consent form. The interviewees granted permission for the audio content of the experience to be digitally recorded using a program offered by Apple Inc., called *Garage Band*. Within one week, a typed transcript of the discussion was provided to the interviewee in a sealed envelope. Inquires were then made to determine the accuracy of the information provided within the transcript. Each participant rejected requests for additional meetings where they could have offered corrections, further details, or clarifications. Instead, the transcripts were approved in their original forms.

I took notes after each interview, indicating my understanding of our rapport throughout the interview. I offered specific reference to the setting of the interview location, as well as the body language of the participant when applicable. I noted any

observable changes in their affect or mood, and juxtaposed the physicality of their behavior to mine.

Data Analysis

The story of how New Jersey's educators perceive the implementation of the ABR was embedded in the data collected via transcribed interviews. The vast nature of the scope of the text was approached through the application of analytical coding using Moustaka's (1994) technique, an adaptation of the Stevick, Colaizzi, and Keen methods (Creswell, 2013; Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The process of content analysis for the interview transcripts was facilitated by computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, specifically QSR International's *NVivo 11*.

Moustaka's (1994) approach to analysis first requires the thoughtful examination of personal experiences with the shared phenomenon in an effort to prevent countertransference. This took the form of a researcher's epoché, in which I detailed my personal experiences spanning 15 years in the classroom including: directly witnessing bullying between students; preventing or stopping physical altercations by physically moving between quarreling students; reporting instances of harassment, intimidation, and bullying to the administration and guidance departments; and sitting through hours of anti-bullying trainings. I used an epoché to determine whether or not mine were considered typical occurrences for high school educators. Continual cognitive processing was required to prevent projection and/or judgment throughout the data collection process. An objective analysis of the gathered data is only possible if all pre-existing

assumptions are removed from the collection first, allowing only the information

provided by the participants to be considered.

Next, Moustaka (1994) calls for the meticulous filtering of significant statements

from each participant. Creswell (2013) offers a minor adjustment to Moustaka's system

as he suggests simultaneously listing unique information that does not overlap, a process

originally conceived in two separate steps. Fulfillment of this stage took the form of

reviewing the responses to each interview question to determine each person's distinctive

experience. Information that was repetitive and ancillary in nature was not considered for

further review. Information unique to a participant's department or location in the

building was included; however, explanations of school wide initiatives became

repetitive and were only noted once. The resulting data were a streamlined set of

statements from each participant with succinct answers to the interview prompts.

Grouping the filtered statements into themes called meaning units represents the

next step in Moustaka's (1994) data analysis approach. The major topics were initially

focused around the research questions. *NVivo 11* software was used to code each

transcript, and case classifications identified participant characteristics that further

divided their responses into common qualities and core themes. These categories had

been anticipated before the research collection process, as their development was the

result of the research process and a fundamental understanding of Espelage and Swearer's

(2004) social-ecological system perspective and Darley and Latané's (1968) *bystander*

theory. The social-ecological model was utilized to establish the relational levels

responsible for observed student behaviors. Participants spoke of their understanding of

the personal character and resulting actions of bullies, bystanders, and victims, and that

data were coded as being influenced at the individual level, relationship/family level,

community/classroom level, and societal/school level (Espelage, et al., 2014). Participant

10 noted the role that community/classroom plays, describing the differences in student

behavior when outside of her classroom, going so far as to explain to students that

misbehavior "… isn't going to work here." Participant 2 spoke of the societal influences

students encounter when fighting was attributed to the "gang related" mentalities

associated with the countries of origins of past and present students. The responsibilities

associated with the faculty, administration, guidance department, and support staff was

coded in accordance with the tenets of *bystander theory*. Presuming that bullying does

exist in their building, knowing it has been reported as such (NJDOE, 2015, 2017), as

each teacher spoke of their level of awareness and their willingness to act to prevent

harassment, intimidation, and bullying, the degree of intervention was coded as noticing

the issue, properly interpreting the situation, taking responsibility to help, deciding how

to help, and taking action.   Of the 12 participants, only 5 participants were grouped

beyond the first step, as they commented that they have witnessed/noticed bullying

amongst the students in their building.

    Moustaka (1994) then calls for textural description to be applied to these filtered

themes in his data analysis approach. Here, the participants offer their experiences in the

form of examples, bringing greater understanding to the phenomenon as it has been

personally experienced from every vantage point. This study focused on the varied

portrayals of the participants' encounters with their perceived challenges as they have

adapted to implement the ABR. A specific area of focus is the concept of before and after as it applies to their classrooms, their curriculums, and their prevention and intervention strategies. Although no participants indicated changing their classroom rules to reflect the updated law, three individuals did note increased classroom vigilance. Participant 6 explained, "I don't think that I have changed, but I have tried to incorporate a lot of awareness." This awareness included "keeping an eye out [for] targeted students" and proactively contacting the guidance department and administration when students are "… behaving differently, or if they are being an aggressor."

Structural descriptions follow textural descriptions as Moustaka's (1994) approach is then tasked with explaining how the experience has taken place for the participants. Here, the physical setting gives way to explaining context and providing understanding.   Each set of participants provided a collective summary of the where and when incidents of harassment, intimidation, and bullying were taking place within the three locations. Participants 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 offered evidence in agreement with the literature when they noted that the most prevalent locations for student-to-student bullying, whether directly observed or related secondhand, were the hallways, cafeteria, bathrooms, gymnasium, and busses (NJEA, 2010; Gleason, 2011; Kann et al., 2014; Kann et al., 2016).

The final step in Moustaka's (1994) approach calls for the rendering of a composite of each of the previous steps. The essence of the experience can then be identified by the streamlined and unambiguous textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants. Meaning is given structure and balance

without the burden of researcher bias. Participant 12 explained that bullying is taking

place, but could not offer a first person account. Context was provided when the layout

of the building was described: "I'm in a corner where there are three teachers down our

entire wing. I honestly don't see anything except what goes on down our end and there's

nothing going on down there." It is not that the specific activities associated with

harassment, intimidation, and bullying are going unnoticed; it is simply that activities in

general are not taking place in this location.

Deviant cases or major discrepancies were not present within the collected data

and did not augment the fundamental understanding of the phenomenon. The greatest

degree of variation was noted when participants divulged what they believe to be the

perceived degree of support offered by their administrations when dealing with student

discipline. This question was opinion based and the range of answers included comments

such as the following: "very good," "inconsistent, but improving," "arbitrary

discipline," and "very ineffective." When participants were asked to reflect on an actual

time when a disruption in their classroom required an administrative intervention, four

participants indicated that they were satisfied – but wished for fairer and firmer results –

while the remaining eight were entirely satisfied with the situation's outcome.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Data were collected from those who observed the phenomenon directly. The

lived experiences of the participants were then analyzed and interpreted in an effort to

better understand the significance of the information (Seidman, 2013). There were no

adjustments made to the plan outlined in Chapter 3, designed to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were demonstrated readily through the existing infrastructure of the data collection process.

Credibility functions within a qualitative study as a measure of accuracy. Credible findings are an indication of reality and truth when viewing the participant's understanding of the lived experience of the phenomenon (Morrow, 2005). Credibility was maintained through member checking, reflexive journaling, and the use of referential adequacy materials within my study. Each participant was asked to approve the transcript of his or her interview. Responses were similar to that of Participant 1 who indicated, "the transcript looks great" and Participant 6 who noted, "All is good, I am happy with it." These affirmations indicate that the participants have been represented accurately and credibly.

Reflexive journaling has allowed for the opportunity to expose preconceived notions about those school districts, areas of study, and course levels that were discussed by the study's participants. It is important to bring to stark light those biases that may have otherwise colored my understanding of the data. Whereas prior to journaling, I may have experienced a visceral reaction to the mention of a specific topic, the information was processed in a more open-minded fashion instead, as I was able to preemptively experience and process the associated emotionality.

Referential adequacy materials were collected and set aside. This information was compared to the analyzed portion of the study to determine whether or not the

study's assertions and themes could be found in the to-be-coded data. The same interpretations were found, indicating that the theories were credible (Guba, 1981).

An effort was made to maximize the application of this research, thereby providing the transferability of the information from this study. Thick description was utilized at all times; the boundaries of my study were defined using rich detail without introducing researcher bias. The setting and sample were thoroughly depicted through detailed notes, which indicated the conditions under which I gathered the data. Thick descriptions were also provided of the social and cultural relationships found within the schools studied, each of them significant and largely different. These details were factual in nature and were collected without inference or bias. The overall intention was to provide enough detail so that the information could be generalized and applied to other populations, not just my study's sample (Saunders, 2012).

Presenting evidence that data can be replicated meets the criteria for dependability within a study. Managing this aspect of trustworthiness took the form of establishing consistency and stability, and specifying factors of instability and change. Detailed records of the process of gathering and interpreting all information were carefully outlined and documented. Member checking and reflexive journaling ensured the data's accuracy while also preventing researcher bias (Guba, 1981). A successful outside review provided by the dissertation committee has also functioned as an indicator that this study's procedure was an acceptable and repeatable means of inquiry.

The data within this study meets the criteria for confirmability, as it has been proven to be objectively collected without bias or prejudice. The gathered information

remained applicable only to the participants without the intrusion of my outside thoughts or opinions. Maintaining a reflexive journal in which my preconceived notions and assumptions were regularly monitored and dispelled ensured the purity of the information gathered. The audit trail was also closely monitored by the dissertation committee to establish the methodological rigor of the decisions that were made in a step-by-step process during the information-gathering phase of this study. This careful detailing and tracking not only justified the progress of the study, but also safeguarded against the possibility of the development or application of bias, as it would have been readily exposed (Shenton, 2004).

Results

Clear themes and varied interpretations of the phenomenon have emerged from the research data. Each research question was tasked with shedding light on a different component of the lived experiences of New Jersey's educators as they implement the ABR. The semistructured interview of the 12 participants incorporated the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of New Jersey high school teachers regarding their role as the first line of defense against harassment, intimidation, and bullying?

2. What have been the individual challenges of New Jersey high school teachers since the implementation of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights?

3. What additional supports do New Jersey high school teachers perceive as necessary for fulfilling their role as the first line of defense against harassment, intimidation, and bullying?

The first research question was designed to outline the perceived responsibilities assumed by the participants as they interact with their student body. This required first establishing their understanding of bullying as well as its prevalence within their building. They were then asked to reflect on their specific role when doing any of the following: confronting incidents of harassment, intimidation and/or bullying; implementing their school's prevention and implementation program; and interacting with bullies, victims, and bystanders.

Participants were able to correctly identify bullying in broad terms, speaking of victimization and a repetition of offenses. Participant 4 identified bullying as "… a repeated act, something that causes harm, and hurtful feelings. It is an intentional act; it is not just a conflict that two kids – or a group of kids – are having. It is repeated constantly with the intent of hurting or harming others." The provided definitions diverged from New Jersey state law when only one person mentioned an imbalance of power. With a workable and mutually acceptable definition established, the prevalence of bullying was then reported as not present or minimal by 9 of the 12 participants. The caveat offered was that bullying does happen on occasion, but the bulk of disciplinary issues are focused on misconduct instead. Two individuals felt that they could not knowledgeably speak of the school's bullying statistics as information is not regularly made available, and one educator believes that bullying is happening more often than is being reported.

Table 1

Participants' Responses to the Presence of Bullying in Their Schools

Response	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Bullying is not an issue	5	42%
Bullying is a minor issue	4	33%
Bullying is a major issue	1	8%
Not enough information to comment	2	17%
Total	12	100%

While representing all three school districts, half of the participants indicated that they have personally witnessed an instance of harassment, intimidation, or bullying. Should future instances arise, 11 of the 12 participants indicated their intention of taking an active role to address the situation in varying degrees. Some were so bold as to indicate a willingness to physically disrupt the dispute, while others sought to confront the students and report the incident. The participants spoke of their intentions to be proactive, to mitigate conflict, to report it when it does happen, and to model appropriate behavior whenever possible. Participant 5 explained her approach: "Anytime I think that there is any type of social injustice, I try to expose the students to it. Then, we have a dialogue about why it is not okay to be like that."

Table 2

Participants' Responses to Their Perceived Role in HIB Situations

Responses	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Actively confront and mitigate	11	92%
Report the situation only	1	8%
Total	12	100%

Specific guidelines were not offered when participants were prompted for their roles when implementing their school's prevention and intervention policies. Instead, general approaches were named; they spoke of setting positive examples, promoting HIB prevention, and reporting behaviors in broad terms. Participant 7 went further, explaining a self-appointed role of attempting to infuse accountability into the faculty, staff, and administration concerning the conflagration of misconduct and HIBs: "Well, I suppose I've been kind of a naysayer. I think my role is to keep people in check when they overuse the word 'bullying.'"

There was an active desire to seek appropriate services for victims by all participants. Participant 11 identified why it is often necessary to involve these additional parties:

We have guidance counselors and some other counselors in the school that worked pretty well with the kids and have a pretty good relationship with them. Very rarely is it just my class that it would be happening in. It's usually happening across the board and it's usually something that's not a surprise.

A slightly more adversarial stance was taken when confronting the aggressor. Participant 2 noted, "We try to find a resolution to the situation. A lot of kids don't understand that what they are doing is bullying." This sentiment was shared by half of the participants,

as they indicated that they were willing to actively work with those perpetrating the

negative behaviors. The remaining six were unsure of how they would handle the

antagonist, as they had no previous experiences to draw from. They chose not to

otherwise speculate as to what their future role might be.

Table 3

Participants' Responses to Personal Experiences with HIB Situations

Responses	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Offer counsel to quarreling students	10	83%
Refer to the administration	2	17%
Total	12	100%

The second research question was tasked with shedding light on the

responsibilities associated with implementing the new tenets of the law. Teachers were

asked if they were able to identify ways in which the teaching and learning environment

has changed as a result of the onset of increased responsibilities. Each teacher described

their teaching and learning environment by stressing the significance of the interactions

they share with their students. They spoke of their rules, which principally focus on a

climate of respect within the classroom. This is typified here by Participant 6:

> I would say my three rules. I only give the kids three rules: respect me, respect
>
> yourself, and respect others. That's how I have enforced things from day one
>
> starting nineteen years ago. Those are my three rules. I don't think that I've
>
> changed, but I've tried to incorporate a lot of awareness.

There were no instances of these rules changing to accommodate the ratification of the

ABR in 2011; they were simply modified to include the new vernacular.

Similarly, changes to the curriculum were not otherwise noted on the individual level. The ABR requires the third week in October be designated as the "Week of Respect" and age appropriate character education must be offered to all publicly educated students (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012). The "Week of Respect" was mentioned at each location, an indication that the schools were in compliance with the law, but model lessons were not noted. The participants explained that character education is a topic that is easily woven into class discussions in English, history, and through the cultural histories in foreign language. Conversations that promote strong morals and antibullying themes can take place once per unit or as often as three times per week. Here, Participant 9 explains her chosen approach:

> One of the things that I like to do as a teacher is to connect something that has happened in the past to something that is similar today, so that the kids can make the bridge. Sometimes, it's a good opportunity for me to talk about these subjects. So, I try to use the past as a connector.

Those participants teaching subjects not associated directly with observing or critiquing behavior or social interaction struggle to pepper their lessons with character education. One example was given by Participant 3 who said, "I have found that it is very difficult to do this in math. If I start a lesson on bullying, they are going to be like, 'Whatcha doin'?! We're in math class!'" This situation has left these educators with what they believe are two remaining choices: allow the topic to come up naturally when the students have an issue from outside of the classroom that they would like to discuss, or do not discuss it at all. In the former instance, the intended curriculum must be

temporarily shelved and precious classroom time utilized. The latter option provides no relief for immediate or encompassing issues; instead solace is offered in the form of a respite from the environment in which these stressors are permitted to exist. Participants have touted neither as ideal, but both are indicated to serve a functional purpose that won't necessarily take place during the third week of October each year.

Table 4

Participants' Responses to HIB Prevention via Character Education Lessons

Responses	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Lessons presented in class	8	67%
Other classes are responsible for this	4	33%
Total	12	100%

Character education and specifically antibullying education were considered different by half of the teachers. This may be the result of the way the questions were phrased, as the topic was broached between two separate questions. It is noteworthy that when the two were distinguished, the presentation of antibullying materials was viewed as more formalized and less organic in nature. Character education was described as part of the role that these educators ascribed to themselves and was practiced by everyone. The antibullying lessons were considered conscripted and the responsibility of someone else for half of the interviewees.

The participants indicated that a safe school environment, free of aggressive behaviors, is the result of proactive measures, educational opportunities for students, and increased awareness for the faculty, staff, and administration. Participant 11 explained the following approach:

Realistically, what I do is just try to show a presence. Like I said, I'm in the

cafeteria and walk around. I do crowd control … and it really is just if the kids

know you're there. A lot of times, it makes them think about doing something or

not doing something. That's really what I do. If I see them do something, I'll

react right away. I don't let it happen, and that's usually how I try to stop it.

There is a preference for actively repairing situations and relationships before they

escalate and require outside or administrative intervention.

When participants were asked to recall specific incidents in which a student

became so disruptive that the learning process had been halted, they unanimously offered

their preference to understand the outburst and manage the situation via private

confrontation. It is noteworthy that all participants indicated that it was very uncommon

for students to be sent out of class. Instead, they preferred to handle their own discipline

and viewed administrative options as a last resort. When situations proved too volatile to

manage within the classroom setting, administrative help was requested. Ten of the 12

teachers found the consequences assigned by the administration to be acceptable,

although 6 of those 10 added that they would have preferred a slightly different solution.

Participant 3 commented, "It's rough, because the kids who should be getting in trouble

are not getting the harshness that they need."

Table 5

Participants' Responses to the Administrative Management of Student Discipline

Responses	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Complete agreement with assigned student consequences	4	33%
Preferred different consequences, but otherwise pleased	6	50%
Did not approve of the situation's management/resolution	2	17%
Total	12	100%

The third research question sought to address the perceived efficacy of the prevention and intervention strategies offered within their school system. Here, the effectiveness of the programs, trainings, and the supports provided by the administration and guidance departments were the primary areas of focus.

With little exception, there was a desire to see fortified efforts at improved communication, a more comprehensive sense of community, and more ubiquitous education. Two participants did not feel they knew enough about their school's program to comment knowledgeably, one individual felt the program lacked efficacy, and the remaining 9 of the 12 expressed their appreciation for the goals of their prevention and intervention programs. When referencing specific incidents, each participant expressed frustration when additional supports are not provided. Primarily, the participants are interested in hearing follow up. They are required to offer full transparency as they deal with HIB situations, and they would like minor reciprocity. Most notably, they would like to know how the student is doing and if any future incidents are anticipated so that they may be aware and appropriately vigilant. Participant 8 offered the following clarification:

As a teacher, knowledge is one of our greatest weapons in the classroom. If one

of my students is being bullied and there's a HIB going on and I don't know that,

it's really detrimental to all of us. I don't need all the details, but I wish that they

would tell us that this student is dealing with an issue, just so that we would

know… They can't tell us anything, so we're in the dark, and we have no clue

that something is going on.

Table 6

Participants' Suggestions for HIB Prevention and Intervention Programming Improvements

Responses	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Improve student awareness	4	33%
Increased faculty/staff training	3	25%
Address cyber HIB issues	2	17%
Stop catastrophizing HIB incidents	1	8%
No comment	2	17%
Total	12	100%

Note. The 10 of 12 participants who participated in this question made two suggestions for improvement. They requested improved top-down communication as well as the responses listed above.

The prevention and intervention programs were not spoken of in specific terms,

nor were they named directly. Teachers indicated that they were largely unaware of the

specific tenets of their programs, as they had never been specifically communicated.

Participant 5 explained ways in which her school's program might better reach its goals

when she offered, "I'm not aware of the specific goals, but I would just say to continue

having the meetings, continue bringing up issues that we see among students."

Information pertaining to the successes of the program(s) was not derived from concrete

benchmarks, but rather from common sense: comparing past to present experiences

indicates fewer negative behaviors, and conclusions were logically drawn.

Table 7

Participants' Responses to HIB Program Goals

Responses	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
The program is meeting its goals	7	58%
The program is not meeting its goals	1	8%
No comment	4	33%
Total	12	100%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100 as a result of rounding.

Participants all indicated that their antibullying and suicide prevention training

took place via *Safe Schools Training*, an online platform that offers scenario learning for

educational settings. They offer courses on youth suicide prevention and awareness as

well as bullying recognition and response (Scenario Learning, 2016). The initial and

refresher trainings offered by *Safe Schools* meets the standards set forth by the ABR (A.

3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012; Scenario Learning, 2016), and their completion is an annual

requirement at each of the locations where data were collected. Though these trainings

maintain the standard set at the state level, they are met with mixed reviews from the

participants as the impact of the initial training has faded. Participant 1 noting the

positive attributes reflected, "I think that the trainings that we have had are helping for

knowing what could happen. For me, it has helped me come up with different ways that I

would like to prevent it from even being an issue." She then went on to note the

following:

At this point, because we have to watch the same video every year on Safe

Schools, it is a waste of my time… I hit play, I do my thing, and then I take the

quiz. I know all the answers. The training itself is not evolving.

Participant 10 also spoke positively of her first experience with *Safe Schools*:

I think these trainings have taught me more about how to respond to something

that I would see in the classroom – a HIB issue or incident. I'm aware more of

what I need to do rather than how I need to teach in my classroom.

She further mentioned, "They get kind of boring after a while, I'm sorry. We watch the

same ones every year for at least the last three years."

Table 8

*Participants' Responses to Compulsory HIB Prevention and Intervention Training
Materials*

Responses	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
They offer proper preparation	2	17%
They are no longer relatable/helpful	10	83%
Total	12	100%

Three distinct locations were chosen for data collection and the variation in

faculty morale was found to have an impact on the collected data. When asked to speak

in general terms, less favorable data were reported about the administration at the school

where teacher satisfaction was lowest. When participants were asked to recall specific

incidents, outcomes of the situations in which the administration was required to act were

noted in a satisfactory manner. Specific to the individual, the administration was meeting

with success. However, when broader terms were applied, the administration was viewed

in a less favorable light. This difference was attributed to poor morale and hearsay, as both were referenced by participants during interviews. Participant 10 spoke to this phenomenon: "I haven't had a problem. But if I listen to other people talk, they're not doing anything. They don't take care of it."

Table 9

Participants' Responses to Perceived General Satisfaction Within Their Buildings

Responses	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Morale is high	6	50%
Morale varies throughout the building	3	25%
Morale is low	3	25%
Total		100%

In all these locations, the general consensus is that the guidance departments are facing unreasonable expectations. This manifested in several ways: two locations were understaffed, and another had counselors who were underinvested in the students – creating an additional burden for those who were genuinely seeking to offer help. Participants noted that resources are diverted to offer triage for crisis rather than routine care. Participant 7 stated, "They don't have any time to sit down and get to know the kids and counsel them. I think they are available when students are in crisis, but I think the way to avoid crisis is to have frequent discussions with students and really know them. I don't think they have the time to really know them."

Table 10

Participants' Responses to the Effectiveness of Their Guidance Departments

Responses	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Very Effective	3	25%
Mediocre	6	50%
Not Effective	3	25%
Total	12	100%

Summary

New Jersey high school educators are the first line of defense for preventing student-to-student harassment, intimidation, and bullying. This is not a role that they have chosen; rather, it has been assigned to them directly by their administrations in accordance with the ABR. The enormity of this role and the consequences associated with improperly fulfilling it has not triggered a paradigm shift or a call to arms within the population studied. This outcome was attributed to a school climate where participants noted minimal bullying taking place and proactive measures that are already perceived to be ubiquitously applied. For this reason, teachers did not speak of their vulnerabilities, but rather, they focused on their strengths – they view themselves as educators, role models, and protectors.

The participants did not speak of overt challenges to implementing the ABR. There were no notable indications of changes made to classroom environments or curriculum in an effort to maintain compliancy with the law. This result was not an act of defiance. Rather, it indicated that these standards were already being met. Students were already expected to offer respect to each other and discipline was managed accordingly.

Every attempt was made to offer character education when applicable in an effort to be proactive and to lead by example.

Teachers have indicated that they are confident in their abilities to manage their classrooms. They spoke of very few discipline issues and reported favorable outcomes when they were required to offer students corrective measures – whether alone or with the help of the administration. Their requests for support were in the form of information. They wanted to know the status of present discipline issues as well as the potential for future altercations. On the whole, the participants indicated that general levels of expectation have been communicated to them, but they were unable to speak to the more granular details of their school's prevention and intervention policy. Ultimately, participants were looking for greater top down communication within their buildings.

The implications of the answers to the research questions will be further discussed in Chapter 5. The data will be juxtaposed to the existing literature in an effort to establish an interpretation of the findings and provide context. The limitations of the study and future recommendations for additional research will be highlighted. Finally, the potential impact for social change will be discussed in detail, and the ultimate ramifications of the study will be noted.

Chapter 5: Interpretation of the Findings

Introduction

The ABR Act should be the answer to all of New Jersey's school-related harassment, intimidation, and bullying issues, as it offers prevention, reporting, investigation, and responding strategies (New Jersey ABR, 2010). However, the growing body of research, which has been amassing since the 1970s (Olweus, 1995 & 2003), indicates outcomes to the contrary. As HIB behaviors have evolved to include the three types of relational bullying and cyber bullying, student-to-student altercations are becoming more ubiquitous and less overt, which has made them more difficult to identify by a passive observer (Berger, 2007; Espelage et al., 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). As the national (Kann et al., 2014) and international data (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011) indicates that the pervasiveness and impact of HIB behaviors are increasing and that detection has stagnated, the writing should be on the wall: the successful implementation of the ABR is not guaranteed.

The intention of my study was to shed direct light on the incongruous nature of the growing trend in HIB detection and the harsh punishments associated with failure as outlined by the ABR. This research was conducted to determine how teachers perceive their roles in the classroom; to better understand the challenges these educators face as they implement their curriculum, school policies, and the ABR in their classrooms; and to identify any additional supports that may still be needed to encourage future successes.

The data collected from the semistructured interviews found that participants seek to be proactive, although they are often left reactive in situations where HIB incidents

have occurred. Their challenges include a limited awareness of how their administrations

are implementing school policy, specifically disciplinary measures; a need for greater

understanding of specific methods of implementation for the ABR; and a desire to better

understand the nuances of high school student relationships. Interviewees suggested that

they would greatly benefit from improved communication within their buildings, and

they requested greater rigor and relevance from their HIB trainings, specifically materials

that focus on teacher-to-student relationship fortification.

The purpose of this chapter is to offer an interpretation of the study's findings.

Context will be applied to the data that has been collected by comparing it to the existing

literature as well as Espelage and Swearer's (2004) social-ecological system perspective

and Darley and Latané's (1968) *bystander theory* framework. The limitations and future

implications associated with the results of the study will be discussed and

recommendations will be made for further research.

Interpretation of the Findings

The ratification of the ABR was in response to the rising trend in harassment,

intimidation, and bullying specifically in New Jersey's schools, but the trend was noted

both nationally (Kann et al., 2014) and internationally (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). The

tenets of this law set in motion a paradigm shift that firmly placed the responsibility for

mitigating this negative movement on the shoulders of classroom teachers (Perez-Peña,

2011). Those educators who do not properly identify and manage bullying are liable to

incur punitive damages (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012).

The peer-reviewed literature has found that HIB behaviors are on the rise worldwide, but, at a first glance, this outcome does not appear to be represented by the current study. What might otherwise represent an incongruity is revealed to be the result of the way in which the data were collected. Educators, not students, were asked their perception of bullying within their schools. They reported very little bullying and often attributed hostilities to peer conflict instead. Whereas the expectation might have been to hear report of such negative behaviors, the research indicates that teachers of all levels and subject matters are more capable of identifying physical than relational bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2007). It is noteworthy that this study did not include students within its sample, preventing the juxtaposition of the perceptions of teachers versus students. The general HIB behavior trends were reflected upon, but the findings may not otherwise be considered confirmed as a result.

The present study sought to understand the perceptions of New Jersey's high school teachers as they implement the ABR. Espelage and Swearer's (2004) social-ecological system and Darley and Latané's (1968) *bystander theory* were implemented as the frameworks responsible for structuring the collected data to thoroughly grasp the motivations of the bullies and teachers, respectively.

When viewed through the eyes of my study's participants, the majority believed that those who harass, intimidate, and bully do so as a result of societal influences. Cultural and social norms were credited with providing tacit approval for the poor choices and dangerous behaviors of their students. Espelage and Swearer's (2004) framework contends that the way we interact with the world is the result of how we relate

to it. The most significant relationships are the most formative, and they are layered in a

manner that is unique to each person. These spheres of relational influence are

concentric, causing them to interplay as they move from family, to friends, to

community, to society at large. When viewed through the lens of the social-ecological

framework, an ominous picture emerges: it was implied that HIB behaviors were a

ubiquitous part of the many relationships that these students participate in. Furthermore,

a pro-HIB mentality was noted at the outermost level, the society.

While participants spoke confidently of the HIB-free climates within their

classrooms, their sphere of positive influence was not capable of overcoming the

unmovable juggernaut that otherwise sanctioned these negative behaviors at the societal

level. The implications of having a lesser influence have been mirrored time and time

again in the research findings. As they have not met with consistent effectiveness,

individual interventions and programs to prevent bullying have largely been considered

only modestly effective (Ansary et al., 2015; Merrell et al., 2008; Polanin et al., 2012;

Smith et al., 2004; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

The participants within this study are the front line defenders of the ABR, and, as

such, they were identified as the bystanders most readily available to provide support(s)

to those students involved in HIB situations. Darley and Latané (1968) designed a five-

stage framework that outlines the criteria that must be met for action to be taken and help

to be provided. As a potential advocate for students, the *bystander theory* calls for

teachers to complete the following steps in order: notice that there is an issue; determine

that help is needed; assume responsibility for the situation; find a solution to the problem;

and intervene.

This study found that half of the interviewees did not progress beyond the first step of the Darley and Latané (1968) process, as they had never witnessed bullying within their buildings. Assumptions may not be made as to whether or not these individuals would have been willing to take responsibility for action, as they have never been offered the opportunity to complete steps two through five. Of the remaining six, three have indicated that bullying is not a significant issue in their buildings; they have not progressed beyond the second step, as they have determined that help has not been necessary.

The application of Darley and Latané's (1968) framework appears deceptively simple, as it is strictly utilized for identifying and solving problems. Harassment, intimidation, and bullying are certainly problematic in schools; however, these behaviors can also be combatted proactively, which cannot be measured by the *bystander theory*. The trend for the participants is to utilize proactive measures. It must be considered that these preemptive measures are employed for different reasons. Some may be operating under the impression that there is no active bullying and proactive measures are the only option. Additional explanations center around feeling more qualified to model appropriate behavior rather than correct or mitigate the poor behavior. As actual bullying statistics were not gathered, this cannot otherwise be determined, only conjectured.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived role of New Jersey's high school educators as they represent the first line of prevention regarding student-to-

student harassment, intimidation, and bullying in the school setting. An understanding of the phenomenon was achieved by conducting semistructured interviews with 12 educators. There were three research questions that were extensively explored using main and follow-up questions. The qualitative data collected was extensive, but limitations to the study were still apparent.

A potential limitation that was addressed was the likelihood of researcher bias. I am a high school science teacher with 15 years of experience in the classroom. I have encountered, interceded, managed, and/or reported countless instances of what I have perceived to be harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying, which has molded my unique perspective concerning student behavior. In an effort to prevent my opinions and judgments from entering the collected data, member checking and reflexive journaling were utilized (Creswell, 2009). Each participant received a transcript of their interview and was asked to verify its accuracy. They were asked to offer corrections and clarifications to ensure that their sentiments were correctly conveyed without augmentation. I also kept a journal detailing my thoughts and assumptions before and after each interview. The entries were juxtaposed to the transcripts, and the documents were carefully reviewed for the addition of unscripted comments or opinions to the interview protocol. None were found, indicating no researcher bias during the collection of data.

The most significant limitation of this study was associated with the size and demographics of the sample group. There were 12 participants, four people from three districts, representing all of New Jersey's high school educators. The criterion-based

sampling method required participants to meet basic timeline conditions, which ensured that they were able to speak knowledgeably about the school setting found both before and after the implementation of the ABR in 2011. The addition of this requirement forced the average age and years of service for the participants to both skew higher than the state averages. In these capacities, the sample does not appropriately represent the population; this discrepancy, however, could not be avoided. Additionally, these interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis, and only those individuals who indicated a willingness to participate were utilized. As the sample was not considered random, it is not possible to rule out bias, as a willingness to participate might be considered representative of greater antibullying sentiments among these educators. Speculation remains where no conclusive evidence may be drawn between the sample and the population, as there could be no reliable standard made available for comparison.

An additional limitation was that the sample group was comprised of nine women and three men. The state of New Jersey contained 26,420 male teachers and 87,928 female teachers during the 2016-2017 school year (NJDOE, 2016). In an ideal setting, the sample would have better represented this ratio, as men represent 30% of the entire teaching population, whereas they comprised 25% of the sample. Including more male participants in future research is suggested for a more diversified and complete perspective on how the ABR is perceived by high school educators.

These three discrete districts varied tremendously in student demographics, student population (Kann et al., 2014), and faculty morale; yet, they were not capable of representing all of the nuances present in New Jersey's high schools. Researchers have

thus far indicated that there exists no surefire approach, no panacea, to finding success when implementing antibullying prevention and intervention strategies. A consensus does exist, however, within the data in which positive school climate is considered the best predictor of program success (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Gendron et al., 2011; Low & Van Ryzin, 2014). It is noteworthy that the data collected did support this finding, but that does not mean that these three districts sufficiently represent the 482 high schools located within the state (NJDOE, 2016). The ability to draw this conclusion with confidence would be contingent on studying each of New Jersey's high schools.

Upon reflection, a study that focused solely on one school may have been equally telling. Extensive efforts were made to ensure that the participating school districts represented the state's averages concerning reported violence, while still providing as much difference and diversity as possible. The literature indicates that school climate plays a pivotal role in the perpetration and prevention of HIB events, indicating that the transferability of the collected data is guaranteed to be limited as every school is different (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Low & Van Ryzin, 2014). With these thoughts in mind, maintaining a singular focus would have maximized the depth of data, instead of its breadth.

Recommendations

Antibullying prevention and intervention training has been highlighted as an area that needs improvement from each of the study participants; they would like more professional development opportunities. Whereas the materials provided by *Safe Schools* meets the requirements set forth by law (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012; Scenario Learning,

2016), the interviewees have indicated that they seek more than basic information concerning harassment, intimidation, and bullying. These educators have indicated that they would like to improve their skillset when interacting with their students. It would behoove the school districts to address prevention and intervention strategies throughout the year, allowing awareness and vigilance to move permanently to the foreground.

The present study revealed that participants value their relationships with their students. It is recommended that school districts incorporate intervention and prevention strategies that focus on teacher-student relationship building and nonthreatening confrontation. The intention is to develop an open environment in which dialogue between students and teachers can take place. The research indicates that teachers fail to successfully identify verbal and social bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2007). The establishment of open communication has the potential to remove the burden of under identification, as those students who see something will then be in a position to say something, capitalizing on the relationship they share with their teacher.

Those study participants that indicated the greatest awareness of bullying behaviors within their building were the individuals who spent the most time interacting with the students, whether in the classroom or via extracurricular school based activities, clubs, or sports. Furthermore, effective classroom management and student discipline have been linked to reduced bullying behaviors (Allen, 2010). It is therefore suggested that the training for relationship building be implemented and that it maintain a broad scope: providing fundamental strategies while modeling appropriate interaction and behavior. This type of instructional strategy would require approaching a district with a

wide enough approach so that technique and rationale would be universally communicated and implemented throughout.

This study revealed recommendations for action as well as opportunities for further research. Teacher participants overwhelmingly indicated a desire to know more about the outcomes associated with the HIB incidents that they have experienced. Pursuant to the law, incidents were reported, but follow ups were never offered from their administrations. As a result, information pertaining to those responsible for implementing investigations and assigning disciplinary consequences was not represented at all. Additional research in which the ABR and administrators were the focus of study would be the only way to approach this dearth of knowledge.

An absence of communication between administrations and their faculty has exposed an additional gap within the research literature. More information needs to be known concerning whether or not administrative feedback plays a role in how successfully high school educators identify harassment, intimidation, and bullying. Specifically, whether or not teachers become more skillful at identifying these behaviors when they are made aware of incidents that they have identified correctly, erroneously, or have overlooked. The primary area of concern for my study's participants was a lack of transparency during HIB investigations, and pursuing this topic will present a challenge. However, the potential outcome of improving teacher efficacy outweighs the trials associated with successfully conducting this form of longitudinal research.

Implications

The desire to remove harassment, intimidation, and bullying from New Jersey's schools is highlighted within the ABR. Strictly outlined expectations and harsh punishments for those who are unable to meet the established standards are clearly displayed for New Jersey's educators. When the law was enacted in 2011 (A. 3466, 2011; A. 749, 2012), the gauntlet was thrown down, and social change was demanded. The participants of this study, however, did not note any form of change within their classroom settings. The data suggests that expressing the need for change versus developing a means for change was interpreted differently.

The flaws associated with the present version of New Jersey's ABR are most obvious when an analogy is used: the ABR Act is similar to a recipe card. The ingredients have been carefully outlined, meticulous care has been taken to explain why each ingredient is necessary, and the consequences of omitting the components are included. The finer details of how to combine these elements, though, are missing. It is implied that they must be mixed, but the actual process has been left to the baker's discretion. Those with greater culinary skills will find success of their own volition, while others, despite their efforts, will make a mess of the kitchen. The educators who participated in this study indicated a desire to prevent HIB behaviors, but they were left to their own devices to implement action within their classrooms.

The lack of direction has, not surprisingly, resulted in a lack of forward progress. My study has shed light on the ubiquitous desire of these educators to better understand bullying, specifically those areas in which they are capable of making a positive impact.

There is an underlying desire for positive social change; however, a large-scale mechanism of implementation has thus far been elusive.

Contributions to the antibullying training in the form of student outreach, specifically relationship building, are highly recommended for the future to bring about change. Study participants indicated that the present level of HIB preparation, and the mechanism for reporting incidents are not enough. There is both a need and a desire to establish a culture of open communication and acceptance in the classroom, and the appropriate training to create this climate must be provided for teachers.

Implementing these strategies at the individual and organizational level will provide a uniform approach to addressing student-to-student bullying. More effective prevention and intervention strategies are capable of influencing school climate, which in turn normalizes the expectation of less bullying behavior (Ansary et al., 2015; Scarpaci, 2006; Ttofi & Farrington, 2012). Administrators, faculty, staff, students, and parents will collectively benefit from these additional trainings and the resulting inevitable positive social change.

Conclusion

Despite efforts to curtail harassment, intimidation, and bullying in New Jersey's classrooms, it still persists. The intention of my research was to better understand the lived experiences of high school educators as they shoulder the responsibility of implementing the ABR, the legislation designed to systematically remove this negative behavior from the state's school systems. The teachers' situation has proven unique, as they are the front line defenders of a policy that carries tremendous penalties should they

meet with failure. The inability to properly identify and report HIB incidents can result in monetary fines, the loss of licensure, and/or the filing of civil or criminal charges.

This study found that when teachers speak theoretically about their role(s) in future HIB situations, they are proactive, seeking to prevent altercations and protect their students. However, when harassment, intimidation, or bullying actually occurs, they are decidedly more reactive and less directly involved: they spend more time reporting occurrences and locating appropriate services for those students who have been impacted.

This research also exposed three fundamental challenges that teachers perceive to be hindering prevention and intervention measures. Participants spoke of their desire for a greater level of awareness concerning the way their administrations are implementing school policy, including the disciplinary consequences associated with these negative behaviors. Specifically, frustrations we expressed over the 'out of my hands' manner in which the reported incidents were handled. The second challenge is the result of procedural breakdown. My study's educators were each aware of what the ABR law required, but, that same understanding did not apply to implementation. The law outlines what should happen within New Jersey's schools; however, the interviewees felt the legislation was lacking in direction, as it fails to offer equally explicit detail concerning action in the classroom. The absence of thorough detection presents as the third challenge to the successful prevention and intervention of HIB behaviors. The participants identified their desire to understand the subtleties of high school student behavior as well as the evolving complexities associated with the myriad forms of

bullying. Detecting anything that is not considered overt HIB behavior is made possible by first understanding student-to-student interaction, and that requires training.

Throughout the interview process, the participants suggested the adaptation of two large-scale supports to facilitate their role(s) and improve their school's prevention and implementation program. These teachers have requested greater communication, specifically as it relates to the dissemination of information. The interviewees would like to know more information about their students that is not considered confidential, but still capable of fortifying the student-teacher relationship. They would also like to better understand the administrative portion of the referral process, including, but not limited to, follow-ups from reported incidents. Secondly, they are seeking improved training opportunities. Whereas introductory level trainings are important and have their place, a need was expressed for advanced trainings to better and more thoroughly identify the nuances associated with the varied forms of bullying.

The intention of this research was to add the high school educator's perspective to the existing body of student-to-student bullying research and, specifically, to shed light on those areas of the ABR that still require improvement. This law has changed considerably since its inception in 2002, and there is hope that it will continue to evolve. This study found that New Jersey's educators seek to reduce HIB behaviors – they just need the appropriate tools of implementation.

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Appendix A: Researcher's Interview Protocol

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:10px;">

Date of Interview:
Location of Interview:
Interview Start Time: **End Time:**
Participant Identifier:

</div>

Demographic Information

Please tell me about your teaching career.
> Probes:
> What (which) grades and subject matter(s) do you teach?
> How long have you been an educator?
> Which educational levels do you teach? What is the percentage of your students that have 504 plans? I.E.P.s?

How would you describe the morale of the faculty and staff in your building?
> Probes:
> How satisfied are you with your position within the building?
> How satisfied are you with your treatment within the building?

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of New Jersey high school teachers regarding their role as the first line of defense against harassment, intimidation, and bullying?

What is your perception of bullying at your school?

How would you define student bullying?

How prevalent is bullying in this school?
> Probes:
> Have you witnessed it directly?
> Where did it take place?

What do you believe your role to be when you witness bullying?
> Probes:
> What do you believe to be the way to resolve bullying situations?

What do you believe your role is in carrying out the school anti-bullying or prevention and intervention strategies?
> Probes:
> Do you think your school's program supports your responses to incidents of bullying?

What experiences have you had with students who have been bullied?

What experiences have you had with students who are bullies?

What are some proactive measures that you take or have taken to effectively decrease bullying?

Research Question 2: What have been the individual challenges of New Jersey high school teachers since the implementation of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights?

Please tell me about the teaching and learning environment in your classroom.
> Probes:
> a. How have your classroom rules changed in reaction to the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act in 2011?
> b. How has the classroom behavior of your students changed since the introduction of the ABR?

How has your curriculum changed since the implementation of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act in 2011?
> Probes:
> How do you incorporate character education into your lesson plans?
> What form of assessment do you use to determine the effectiveness of these lessons?
> How do you present anti-bullying materials in the classroom?
> How often do you present these materials?

What are your strategies for dealing with bullying?
> Probes:
> What key components are there to maintaining school safety?
> What key components are there to combating aggressive student behavior?

What is your typical response to a student who exhibits behavior that is disruptive enough to inhibit your ability to conduct your class?
> Probes:
> How often do you send students out of your classroom to the main office for discipline?

What is your typical level of satisfaction with the administrative disciplinary actions assigned to these students?

Research Question 3: What additional supports do New Jersey high school teachers perceive as necessary for fulfilling their role as the first line of defense against harassment, intimidation, and bullying?

Do you believe that your school's anti-bullying program is meeting its goals?
    Probe:
    How can you tell?
    What are the strengths of the program?
    What do you think can be done to better reach the goals of the program?

Do you feel that you have received the proper training to handle bullying within your school community?
    Probes:
    In which ways do you find these trainings have prepared you for your classroom experiences?
    Can you describe any ways in which you do not relate to the required trainings?

How often does your school provide required trainings for:
    a. the prevention of harassment, intimidation, and bullying?
    b. suicide prevention?
    c. cultural sensitivity?

How would you describe the effectiveness of your administration?
    Probes:
    What is your opinion of the effectiveness of the administration concerning student discipline?

How would you describe the effectiveness of your guidance department?
    Probes:
    To what degree do you believe your guidance department is offering the appropriate supports for students in general?
    To what degree do you believe your guidance department is offering the appropriate supports for students as bullies, bystanders, or victims?

Is there anything else about school bullying that you would like to share? Anything I haven't asked about?