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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF MIDDLE SCHOOL BULLYING IN
THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY, TEXAS

A Dissertation

by

VANESSA CRISTINA CANTÚ

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2015

Major Subject: Rehabilitation Counseling

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF MIDDLE SCHOOL BULLYING IN
THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

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by
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August 2015

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ABSTRACT

Cantú, Vanessa Cristina, A Phenomenological Study of Middle School Bullying in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas. Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), August, 2015, 142 pp., 3 tables, 117 references, 7 appendices.

The purpose of this paper was to describe the study concerning special education students in middle school who were bullied. Many students in the special education program are being bullied, whether it is due to their disabilities or other factors (Mishna, 2003; Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2009; Coloroso, 2008; Christensen, Fraynt, Neece, & Baker, 2012). While several quantitative studies have been conducted addressing this worldwide phenomenon, few qualitative studies have been performed.

A phenomenological approach allowed the participants to share their own experiences with bullying. Twenty-five students from several middle schools (6th, 7th, 8th grades) in a city in the Rio Grande Valley, an area of the southernmost tip of South Texas, were asked to participate in this study. A semi-structured 45-minute interview was conducted at the students' schools. The interviews were recorded with a microcassette recorder and then transcribed. As suggested by Creswell (2013), the data analysis process included coding the statements and forming themes from these statements in order to understand the meaning found from these students' common experiences of bullying.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and friends who encouraged me throughout this process. Thank you for believing in me. I also dedicate this to every person who has ever experienced bullying. Hopefully one day every human will recognize that love and kindness is the best path to choose for ourselves and others.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Roy Chen, chair of my dissertation committee, for his continuous support. Not only are you my mentor, but you are also a true friend. Thank you for everything.

I would also like to thank my dissertation committee members: Dr. Charlene Blankenship, Dr. Chuck Reid, and Dr. John Lowdermilk, III. This endeavor would not be possible without your advice and comments.

A big thanks also goes out to those Brownsville Independent School District members who allowed and helped me to pursue my research: administrators, counselors, parents, and most importantly, the students who allowed me to hear their personal stories. You are true heroes.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter I describes the problem of bullying, states the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, as well as the limitations of the study. The research questions are outlined and operational terms are defined.

Statement of the Problem

Bullying is the term used in The United States of America. The Scandinavian countries, Norway and Denmark, refer to it as mobbing (Olweus, 1993). Ijime is the name in Japan (Coloroso, 2008). La intimidación (Srabstein, 2013) and el bullying (Georgiou, Fousiani, Michaelides, & Stavrinides, 2013; Reyes-Hernández et al., 2013) is the phrase used in Latin countries. Bullying is a world-wide phenomenon (Piskin, 2002). Bullying is the most reported type of school violence (Carney, 2009). In 2001 Nansel et al. found that at least 1,634,095 students in the United States are bullied each year (Nansel et al., 2001). In 2013 this number has nearly doubled. DoSomething.org stated that over 3.2 million students are bullied each year.

In a study of 119 adolescent students, 39 percent reported that they had been bullied at some time during their school years (Frisén, Jonsson, & Persson, 2007). Most bullying takes place at school (Olweus, 1993). Despite efforts to prevent bullying in schools, it is still an occurring problem world-wide (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). While it is not a new issue, this problem is one that has come to the forefront due to recent media reports on

adolescents who have committed suicide because of different forms of bullying. Although there are several interventions that have been used by campuses, bullying continues to manifest itself in schools. While there have been a variety of quantitative studies (Carey, 2003; Carran & Kellner, 2009; Christensen, Fraynt, Neece, & Baker, 2012; Didden et al., 2009; Flynt & Morton, 2004; Frisé & Bjarnelind, 2010; Frisé & Holmqvist, 2010; Frisé, Lunde, & Hwang, 2009; Frisé, Holmqvist, & Oscarsson, 2008; Maunder, Harrop, & Tattersall, 2010; Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2009; Sweeting & West, 2001) on the bullying issue, few qualitative studies (Espelage & Asidao, 2001; Mishna, 2004; Willis & Griffith, 2010) have dealt with this issue.

It is critical that more studies focus on the students' bullying experiences and the meaning they take from them to better understand and evaluate a more effective way to handle and deal with this issue. "Adolescents have a very close view of the bullying problem and may, for that reason, have valuable experience of the outcome of different approaches to counter the problem," (Frisé & Holmqvist, 2010, p. 130). And while the general population of any school may experience bullying, researchers have found that there are many students with disabilities who are experiencing bullying. The studies that have been done on students with disabilities show that these students have a higher likelihood of being bullied than their peers without disabilities (Pivik, McComas, & Laflamme, 2002; Raskauskas, & Modell, 2011; Saylor & Leach, 2009).

Several researchers have found that students in the special education program are victims of bullying (Christensen et al., 2012; Coloroso, 2008; Mishna, 2003; Rose et al., 2009). Students with physical and/or mental disabilities are two to three times more likely to be bullied than other students (Coloroso, 2008). The reason is that these students have a disability that can be observed and thus more easily attacked for it. Christensen et al. (2012) stated that adolescents

with intellectual disabilities report being bullied more than their peers with “normal” cognitive development. Relatedly, Sweeting and West (2001) found that regardless of gender or socioeconomic status, if a student had a disability (e.g., speech, sight, hearing), considered physically unattractive, overweight, or did poorly academically, they were a target of bullying. Lines (2008) reported that schools are the perfect environment for bullying to occur because a natural imbalance of power is already set up. For instance, students observe their teachers as well as other staff adhere to the administrators’ rules, and such, students begin to form their own roles in this hierarchical structure. Of all the educational settings, middle school students are the ones who are experiencing it the most (Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006; Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009). This rise in bullying may be due to the transition from elementary to middle school (Nansel et al., 2001; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Solberg, Olweus, & Enderson, 2007) as new peer groups are being formed. Along with peer group formation, many middle school students are also going through puberty (Frisén & Bjarnelind, 2010). Frisé and Bjarnelind (2010) wrote that more than any other developmental period, peers have the most influence on each other. Flynt and Morton (2004) found 40% of middle school students have reported being bullied at least once per week. For this reason, it was necessary to interview special education middle school students (6th, 7th, and 8th grade) who have dealt with bullying in order to get their perceptions on the best way to deal with this world-wide phenomenon.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe, from the perspective of the special education middle school students, the effects that bullying had on them. More specifically, this study aimed to find out what interventions they believe needed to be enforced by the adults (i.e., administrators, counselors, teachers, staff, as well as parents) in order to prevent or counteract the bullying behavior that they have experienced within the school setting.

A qualitative research design was implemented using the life story method as well as semi-structured interviews.

The following research questions were addressed in order to better understand bullying interventions from the middle school students' perspective:

1. What meaning do special education middle school students ascribe to their experiences with bullying?
2. How do these students cope with bullying?
3. What interventions do these students suggest might be helpful in dealing with bullying?

Significance of the Study

As stated above, over 3.2 million students are bullied each year in the United States (DoSomething.org, 2013). However, bullying is not just a problem in this country; it occurs in many countries (Piskin, 2002). The findings of this study are important for the following reasons. First, it provides the reader a more in-depth look at the effects of bullying. Second, the findings from this study may provide school administrators, guidance counselors, staff, and parents an opportunity to assess whether they are dealing with bullying effectively. Third, the information gathered and analyzed in this study may have an impact on the overall understanding of how middle school students, specifically ones in special education, perceive adults to handle the situation, and whether they feel that they can cope/handle acts of bullying. Finally, the findings of this study provide policy makers with the necessary information to make informed decisions regarding the need and importance of keeping track of interventions.

Assumption

A basic assumption was that the participants experienced a form of bullying.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation was that the results were not generalizable due to the restricted middle school sample population. This study was also based in one geographic area. Furthermore, open-ended questions in the interview allowed for the participants to leave out relevant information. However, due to the design of the study, this was to be expected.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to public middle schools (6th, 7th, 8th grades) in Brownsville, Texas. Additionally, the participants had to be part of the special education program. They also had to have been referred to their guidance counselor for being the target of bullying.

Definition of Terms

Adolescence

This is the transitional developmental period between childhood and adulthood (Meulemann, 2003). Erikson (1963) wrote that adolescence falls between the ages of 10 to 19 while the Child Development Institute (2009) defined that adolescence is between the ages of 13 to 18. Tucker, Smith-Adcock, and Trepal (2011) described adolescence as the ages between 11 to 14.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

This is a federal law established in 1990 to prevent discrimination against people with disabilities (Cavaliere, Mulvaney, & Swerdlow, 2012). In 2008 Congress amended the ADA by broadening the interpretation of the term “disability” among other revisions (Concannon, 2012). ADA is now known as the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA).

Bullycide

Refers to someone committing suicide due to being bullied (Coloroso, 2008).

Bully

A person who is perceived as having more power repeatedly causes harm, either mentally or physically, to another (Flynt & Morton, 2004).

Bullying

Bullying occurs when there is an imbalance of power, an intent to harm, and threat of further aggression (Coloroso, 2008). Accordingly, bullying must have repeated negative actions, over time, and not just a one-time event (Olweus, 1994).

Bystander

A bystander is the person who either watches a target get bullied and does nothing to help or participates in the bullying (Coloroso, 2008). Sometimes bystanders choose to help the victim (Frisén et al., 2009).

Cyberbullying

This kind of bullying can be defined as an electronic form that is “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms (e.g., Internet or cellphones) of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend itself,” (Didden et al., 2009, p. 147).

Direct Bullying

This kind of bullying can be observed; it involves open attacks (verbal and physical) on the victim (Olweus, 1993).

Disability

According to the ADA and Section 504, a person has a disability when he or she:

(1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of that person; (2) a record of the impairment; (3) or being regarded as having the impairment (ADA, 1990; USDHHS, 2006).

Indirect Bullying

This kind of bullying is less visible. Social isolation and intentional exclusion are two examples (Olweus, 1993).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

This federal law provides funds to state and local agencies for students with disabilities receiving special education services (Bennett & Frank, 2009). IDEA originated from Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act), the first special education law enacted in 1975 (Kreisman & John, 2010). Since then Congress has reauthorized and amended P.L. 94-142 five times with The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 being the most recent reauthorization (Milligan, Neal, & Singleton, 2012).

Middle School

This is the setting where the transitional school years (usually 6th, 7th, and 8th grades) between elementary and high school take place. This is also where early adolescence usually begins (Bunting, 2004).

Physical Bullying

This kind of bullying occurs less than one-third of the time and males use this form more often than females. Examples include slapping and punching (Coloroso, 2008).

Relational Bullying

Females use this kind of bullying more often than males. This includes actions such as ignoring, shunning, and sabotaging friendships (Coloroso, 2008).

Section 504

This is a part of a federal law (Rehabilitation Act of 1973) that protects the rights of people with disabilities in programs and activities that receive financial assistance from the federal government (Bennett & Frank, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Special Education

This is a federally mandated school program provided to students who have special needs due to a disability (Powell, 2006). Services provided to students in this program include early interventions, coordination of care, and helping students transition from high school to college or employment (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

Target

A target is the person who receives the bully's negative behavior. A target does not fit a stereotypical description. It can be anyone (e.g., skinny, overweight, intelligent, short, tall, etc.) (Liepe-Levinson & Levinson, 2005).

Verbal Bullying

This is the most common form of bullying and both genders use it equally. It includes words (spoken and written). Examples include name-calling, gossip, and threatening e-mails (Coloroso, 2008).

Organization of the Study

Examined in this study was bullying and its effect on special education middle school students. This paper is divided into five parts. In chapter I, an introduction of the study is provided and includes the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, as well as the research questions. Delimitations and limitations of the research were established and definitions of important terms and assumptions were provided. Chapter II

contains a review of the empirical literature pertaining to bullying, specifically bullying in the school setting, with a narrow focus on middle school students and students in the special education program. Included in the literature review is a description of the theoretical framework, psychosocial factors, types of bullying, interventions for bullying, and laws focused on bullying. Included in Chapter III is a description of the participants, setting, and methodology. Chapter IV provides the results of the study as well as a discussion of these findings. Finally, Chapter V concludes with the limitations, implications, and future research suggestions.

Summary

Chapter I introduced the problem of bullying, stated the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, as well as the limitations of the study. The research questions were outlined and the operational terms defined.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter II provides a review of the literature that is relevant to this study. This review describes the theories consistent with this topic, psychosocial factors, types of bullying, interventions to use against bullying, the adolescent developmental period, legislation pertinent to bullying, and relevant studies on bullying. Furthermore, a section describing the qualitative method is also presented in this chapter.

Although bullying has occurred for decades, it was not researched until the 1960s, and then it peaked during the 1980s (Olweus, 2003). In 1983 Dan Olweus, a Scandinavian professor of psychology considered the pioneer of bullying research, conducted a study which collected data from 700 Norwegian schools for the Ministry of Education (Carey, 2003). Since then, researchers have conducted studies in other countries as well. Some of these countries include the United States, Britain, Sweden, Japan, Australia, and Canada (Didden et al., 2009; Espelage & Asidao, 2001; Frederickson, 2010; Frisé & Holmqvist, 2009; Maunder et al., 2010; Mishna, 2004; Olweus, 1993; Pearce, Cross, Monks, Waters, & Falconer, 2011; Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker, & Frerichs, 2012). For decades bullying has been affecting adolescents; however, research did not come to the forefront until Olweus started studying bullying in Norway during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Olweus, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

Swearer and Doll (2001) used Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory when describing bullying. Bronfenbrenner's theory states that people learn according to their social and physical environments. In essence, a student is affected by everyone's (i.e., parents, friends, teachers) behavior as well as by his or her immediate surroundings (i.e., school grounds, cultural factors, neighborhood). To be more specific, Swearer et al. (2009) described the four interrelated systems proposed by Bronfenbrenner. The first is the microsystem. This is the system where the person has direct contact with other individuals (parents, friends, teachers) as well as places (school and church). The second is the mesosystem. This system involves the interrelations between the microsystems. For instance, if a student has a healthy relationship with his or her parents, he or she might be better equipped to establish healthy friendships as well. The third is the exosystem. This is the influence from one system on another, such as how much parental involvement there is at their child's school. The fourth is the macrosystem. This includes cultural and societal factors that influence a student. In this case there is a constant interplay working and this promotes how someone acts.

A related theory is Albert Bandura's social learning theory. Bandura (1973) argued that behavior is shaped by what one observes. Since students spend a majority of their time in school, they are constantly observing how others act, how they are disciplined, and if they can get away with certain behavior (Howard, Horne, & Jolliff, 2001). Students learn by what they see and act accordingly depending if they choose to emulate positive or negative role models. Coloroso (2008) believes that even though bullying is a learned behavior, it can still be changed.

According to Frederickson (2010), students in special education programs are more likely to be rejected by their classmates as well as more likely to get bullied than other children. She

wrote that attribution theory offers an explanation of this behavior. Attribution theory deals with how one perceives people or events. If someone perceives something as negative because of prior experience or knowledge, he or she will continue to perceive a similar event or person this way. However, if taught differently, they will acquire a new perception. For example, if an adolescent witnesses another teenager who has autism behaving “strangely,” he or she might form a negative judgment. However, if it is explained to this adolescent how someone with autism might behave, the adolescent might then perceive the teen’s mannerisms differently, and even more positively.

Psychosocial Factors

A variety of psychosocial factors are related to bullying. Some of these include depression (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpelae, & Rantanen, 2001; Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagle, & Mickelson, 2001; Szalavitz, 2012), anxiety (Olweus, 1993), and low self-esteem (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Additionally, social and academic development can be affected (Piskin, 2002). For example, the author stated that students who are victimized begin to dislike school. Furthermore, their grades are affected negatively (Graham, Bellmore, & Mize, 2006; Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & Toblin, 2005). Also, students who bully, if left unchecked, are more likely to commit crimes as adults as well as abuse drugs like alcohol (Olweus, 1993).

Furthermore, Olweus (1993) elaborated the characteristics commonly observed within the typical victim and bully. For instance, targets of bullying are generally more anxious and insecure than the rest of their peers. Their self-esteem is very low, oftentimes to the point that they have a very negative view of themselves. They are usually the loners who are abandoned at school. They do not have too many friends. If the target is a boy, he is usually physically weaker than the bully. Passivity on the parts of the victims might play a role in igniting the

bully's awareness that the target is insecure and weak, thus making the target a good candidate for bullying.

On the other hand, Olweus (1993) described the typical bully as being aggressive, not only to his or her peers, but also toward adults. They have a tendency toward violence, are impulsive, need to dominate others, as well as have little empathy for their victims. While targets of bullying typically have low self-esteem and high anxiety, bullies are the opposite. On the contrary, they have a high self-esteem and little anxiety. Also, bullies generally have a small group of friends and are popular to an extent. Olweus (1993) argued that bullies bully because they have a strong need to dominate and overpower others, may have learned hostility from their home environment, and may benefit from their negative behavior (e.g., coercing their victims to give them money or receiving prestige amongst their peers). Cloud (2012) suggested that prevention and intervention efforts should primarily be focused on bystanders because these are the students that encourage the bullies' actions by either laughing or ignoring it rather than standing up for the victim.

In worst case scenarios adolescents who have been bullied commit suicide and even homicide (Carney, 2009). Just recently the media reported the suicide of Phoebe Prince, a high school freshman, who had told school officials a week before her death that she was being bullied (Kern, 2010). Although six teenagers were initially charged in her death, in the end only one was required to plead guilty to a misdemeanor count of harassment (Bazelon, 2013).

Types of Bullying

There are different types of bullying. Some include verbal, physical, relational/emotional, and more recently, cyberbullying. Verbal bullying includes saying words that are hurtful such as "loser," "fat ass," and "fag." It is the most common form of bullying and

according to Coloroso (2008), 70 % of reported bullying involves this type. Males and females use it equally. Although verbal signifies spoken words, it can also include written ones such as unkind e-mails.

Physical bullying includes pushing, shoving, hitting, and any physical action that seems intolerable to the victim. In this case, males use this form more often than females. However, it occurs less than one-third of the time as compared to the other forms (Coloroso, 2008). Although physical bullying occurs less than the other forms, it is considered very serious because the person who uses this type of bullying usually has the most psychological issues and often commits more serious criminal offenses as he or she ages.

Just as males use physical bullying more than females, females use relational bullying more than males. Relational bullying includes actions such as ignoring or pretending someone is invisible (e.g., not letting someone sit near you at the cafeteria table). Spreading rumors is another example of relational bullying. Gray, Kahhan, and Janicke (2009) found that students that are obese often face relational forms of bullying. Coloroso (2008) wrote that this type of bullying peaks for adolescents during their middle school years.

Cyberbullying includes bullying through the use of electronic means (e.g., cell phones, Internet). Examples include mean text messages; instant messages; pictures; video clips; and e-mails (Pearce et al., 2011). There is also sexual bullying which includes lifting skirts, unsnapping bras, and pulling someone's pants down (Thompson, Arora, & Sharp, 2002). It also includes using derogatory words such as "sissy" and "pussy" for males and "slut" and "cunt" for females (Coloroso, 2008).

Interventions

There are several suggestions for preventing and intervening against bullying. Scaglione and Scaglione (2006) suggested a variety of methods. One method is communication. For whatever reason, many students do not know how to talk about this subject; therefore, the adults in their lives (parents, teachers, community members) need to discuss the ramifications of bullying. Once the discussion is out there, students can begin to feel more comfortable addressing this issue with adults they feel at ease with. At this point the adult should listen and not downplay the situation in any way. Every person experiences the same situation differently so it is imperative that the adult hear the student completely and not make any judgments such as, “Just ignore it,” or “That’s not so bad.” Thompson et al. (2002) emphasized that the entire school community should be on the same page when it comes to understanding the problem of bullying. It cannot be assumed that everyone has the same definition for bullying or even knows how to deal with it. Trainings are needed to educate the staff about the bullying epidemic as well as prevention and intervention strategies (Garbarino & deLara, 2003). The goal is for everyone to use the same procedures when handling a bullying situation so the students can observe the adults taking appropriate action rather than ignoring the problem (Cooper & Snell, 2003).

Just like Scaglione and Scaglione (2006) cited communication as key to preventing and intervening against bullying, Coloroso (2008) also emphasized this with more specific techniques. First, never minimize, rationalize, or explain away the bullying behavior. Bullying is never justified and always wrong. Second, do not hurry to solve the problem for the student. Encourage and guide the student to come up with ways to deal with the bullying. This guidance and support without immediately jumping in and solving the problem for the student will have a positive impact by empowering the student. The student will come to understand that he or she

is able to find solutions on his or her own. Third, never tell the student to avoid the bully. This is a temporary solution for a long-term problem. Ignoring never works and only encourages the idea that running and hiding from one's problems is the best solution. Instead, encourage the student to be assertive whenever the bully confronts him or her. Fourth, never encourage the student to fight back. Fighting as a means to deal with bullying is not a life skill that should be taught because an adolescent that uses this method will most likely face suspension or expulsion. In adulthood a tougher penalty like jail time might occur. Again, this is not an effective method to solve problems.

Assertiveness is key. Using the mind is sometimes harder than using the fists, but once a student learns the effective tool of assertiveness, he or she will have more success dealing with life's problems. One more important point is that too often school officials make the mistake of forcing the bully and victim into a conflict resolution.

According to Coloroso (2008), bullying has nothing to do with conflict, but everything to do with contempt, so scheduling a conflict resolution for both students is wrong. In fact, it will make matters worse. Students with equal status benefit from mediation, but not bullies and their victims (Bazelon, 2013).

Bullies get their fuel from power and do not want to give it up (Harpaz, 2012). The bully will most likely lie or pretend to be sorry about his or her actions and the victim's sense of self will continue to deteriorate because he or she will know that nothing has been resolved through this meeting. The bullying might even get worse because the bully is seeking revenge now. Rather than facilitating a conflict resolution, both students should be worked with separately to teach them social skills. For example, the bully might learn empathy skills while the victim could learn assertiveness skills. "The scariest aspect of bullying is the utter lack of empathy,"

(Bazelon, 2013, p. 55). In Midland, Texas, the school district is planning to implement suicide prevention and anti-bullying programs that have a component which focuses on character education in order to teach its students about self-esteem and self-worth (Moriak, 2012).

Bullying involves an imbalance of power so teaching the target of bullying to stand up for himself or herself can change the dynamics of the situation (Rigby, 2002). Assertiveness is not the same as aggressiveness. Assertiveness means standing up for oneself in a positive manner while being aggressive has a more negative tone. An example of assertiveness could be looking the bully in the eye, standing tall, and voicing firmly that the acts of bullying will not be tolerated. On the other hand, aggressiveness could be punching the bully or insulting the bully.

Being assertive and aggressive are two traits that are learned. For this reason it is important to teach students the proper way to behave in multiple situations; it involves character education (Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006). Helping students think of assertive comeback lines can be really effective (Coloroso, 2008). For example, saying, “Hey, I don’t want any problems with you,” in a confident tone can give the impression to the bully that the student will not tolerate this behavior and begin to change how the bully sees this student. The tone should not be hostile because this will only perpetuate the cycle of bullying. Character education and social skills training is very important (Mishna, 2003), especially for students with disabilities, as Christensen et al. (2012) found that low social skills were the main predictor of adolescents with disabilities being bullied.

It is easy to just say how one should behave, but role modeling is much more effective. Students learn a lot from what they see at home. The student witnesses whenever a parent exhibits hostility easily or when a parent approaches a difficult situation with calmness. Students mimic adults’ behaviors, especially when the adult is someone they look up to (e.g., parent,

teacher, community member), so it is important for adults to learn and model the appropriate behaviors as well. Modeling correct social behaviors is the first defense to preventing bullying.

Correct behaviors are reinforced when clear campus and classroom rules are established (Coloroso, 2008). Consequences must be consistent so the message is clear that bullying will never be tolerated, under any circumstance. Furthermore, in order to prevent bullying in the first place, there must be proper adult supervision in places like the cafeteria, gym, hallways, and the restrooms. Carney (2009) calls these locations “key zones,” (p. 759). These are often places where bullying takes place since it is less structured than the classroom. In fact, Olweus (1993) firmly stated that the higher the number of staff supervising during break periods (lunch and recreational time), the less chances for bullying incidents to occur. This strategy is known as positive behavior supports (PBS) (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012).

Many schools enforce zero-tolerance policies; however, research findings suggest that the zero-tolerance method is not effective (APA Task Force on Zero Tolerance, 2008; Casella, 2003). Strategies such as in-school and out-of-school suspension, expulsion, as well as removal from the campus are ineffective because it still does not teach the bully the proper way to treat someone. On the contrary, these methods teach students that the very institutions that are supposed to educate them actually reject them (Swearer, Limber, & Alley, 2009). Learning proper social skills is key to preventing bullying in the first place. Swearer et al. (2009) advocated developing anti-bullying policies that have intervention policies which demonstrate ways to teach students effective social relationships. Although policies do sometimes entail more work, they can promote positive change (Soutter & McKenzie, 2000). Swearer et al. (2009) suggested six steps to developing an effective anti-bullying policy: (1) define bullying behaviors; (2) refer to available model policies; (3) clearly outline reporting of incidents; (4)

clarify investigation and disciplinary actions; (5) include assistance for victims of bullying; and (6) include training and prevention procedures.

Another method suggested by Scaglione and Scaglione (2006) involves the use of literature as well as real-life stories. There are books about bullying, for all ages, on the market. To eliminate the financial expense, “make-believe” or true accounts (e.g., Phoebe Prince) can be discussed. The main purpose is for adults to read the stories or talk about the incidents and discuss with the students what was learned and how future incidents can be prevented.

Besides teaching proper social skills and using bibliotherapy as an intervention, Swearer et al. (2009) suggested working with the underlying problem. For example, a bully might be depressed and taking this pain out on someone else or the target may be experiencing anxiety. The authors explain that getting to the root of the students’ problems (e.g., depression, anxiety) can help to reduce and even stop the bullying. Therefore, effective counseling (individual and/or group) by a mental health professional is necessary.

Adolescent Developmental Period

There are different interpretations of adolescence. According to Erikson (1963), in the United States 10 to 19 is considered the typical age range for the adolescent stage in one’s lifetime. However, the Child Development Institute (2009) categorized adolescence as ages 13 to 18. Tucker et al. (2011) used the ages 11 to 14 to describe the typical adolescent. These are the ages of students typically found in middle schools. Erickson (1963) developed the psychosocial stages of development to describe the stages of a person’s life.

The adolescent developmental period falls on the cusps of the industry versus inferiority stage, but according to Erikson (1963), the adolescent developmental period was in the fifth stage, identity-versus-identity confusion (Santrock, 2005). It is in this developmental stage that

exploration of oneself is critical. This exploration entails allowing the adolescent to seek romantic relationships (in a healthy manner) and research future career options. If an adolescent is restricted from seeking that exploration, problems may occur.

Bunting (2004) described early adolescence as a time when students begin to observe growth spurts, an inclination for independent thinking, moodiness, fixation with appearance, worries about belonging, more freedom, as well as more responsibilities, recognition of unique talents, as well as gaining a sense of empathy for others. Meulemann (2003), like Erikson, further stated that the developmental tasks of adolescence, especially nearing adulthood, include finding a job, securing a romantic partner, and figuring out one's personal worldview. It is a complex developmental period.

According to Frisén and Bjarnelind (2010), the adolescent years can be “one of the loneliest times of life” if the teenager is rejected by his or her peers (p. 597). During this developmental period, over any other, peers have the most influence. If the impact is positive, then the adolescent will develop a healthy social and psychological construct; however, if the opposite, then the adolescent might obtain an unhealthy concept of himself or herself.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), the current population in the United States is 316,128,839; the Hispanic population accounts for 16.9% of this population. The Hispanic adolescent population accounts for approximately 30% of the total Hispanic population in the United States (Garcia, Skay, Sieving, Naughton, & Bearinger, 2008).

In Western cultures, adolescence is often described as a time of emotional upheaval, moodiness, and selfishness (Collins & Harvey, 2001). Additionally, Collins and Harvey (2001) explained that adolescents whose cultural background differs from the prevailing Anglo culture might have more difficult experiences – adolescent depression being one of them. According to

Molina, Gomez, and Pastranna (2009), the incidence of depression and suicide are increasing, especially among the Hispanic adolescent population. Along with Molina et al. (2009), Garcia et al. (2008) also found that Hispanic adolescents face a disproportionate rate of mental health problems such as suicide and depression.

According to the researchers, suicide and depression can be due to not becoming acculturated and assimilated into mainstream society. In essence, there is a feeling of being “left out,” from what is considered “normal” in their new environment. If an Hispanic adolescent has been brought up in American society, there is still a high chance of experiencing depression because there is still the cultural factor. If one is brought up in a manner that is different from the majority of society, then the adolescent might succumb to the pressure of being one way to please one group of people and another way to please another group.

Legislation

A highly publicized bullying incident that resulted in the death of a middle school student in Georgia prompted the state’s legislature to pass a law addressing bullying in 1999; this was the first state to pass an anti-bullying law (Alley & Limber, 2009). Relatedly, a Georgia law also requires public schools to have a character education curriculum implemented (Bazelon, 2013). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2012) the majority of the states (including Puerto Rico) have both anti-bullying laws and policies. Arizona, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, North Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas have anti-bullying laws, but no policy. Montana is currently the only state without an anti-bullying law; it only has a policy. The federal government website, stopbullying.gov, managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides explanations, offers prevention measures, as well as includes in-depth material about each state’s laws, policies, and education codes.

Although every state, except Montana, has passed anti-bullying laws, there are no federal anti-bullying laws (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2012). However, even though a student who has been victimized cannot bring a federal lawsuit based on bullying alone, there is definitely a case if he or she was harassed based on gender, race, or disability because these characteristics are the students' federally protected rights (Alley & Limber, 2009). There are several federal laws that address this.

In a letter addressed to colleagues, former Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Russlynn Ali, discussed the serious nature of bullying and its effects on students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Additionally, Ali reminded the readers of several pertinent laws: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin prohibited); Title IX of Education Amendments of 1972 (discrimination on the basis of sex prohibited); section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).

Section 504 and the ADA deal specifically with discrimination against people with disabilities. Section 504, a civil rights law, states that organizations that receive federal money (i.e., public schools and businesses) are prohibited from discriminating against people with disabilities (Shaw & Madaus, 2008). Accordingly, Title II of the ADA also prohibits discrimination, but the major difference is that Section 504 deals with federal funds while Title II deals with local and state funds (Weber, 2010). However, both laws affect public schools because they receive funds from the local, state, and federal levels. Schoen and Schoen (2010) explained that school officials should realize that students with disabilities face a high proportion of bullying; therefore, they need to implement plans to thwart these kinds of behaviors.

In *K.M. v. Hyde Park Central School District* (2005), a parent of a child with a developmental disability sued the school district and school officials for violating the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (section 504) and Title II of the ADA. The parent's child was bullied verbally and physically at his middle school. Apparently, the school officials were aware of the bullying, but took no action. The bullying became so bad that the parent removed the student from the school. The court found that the school district and officials were responsible for their lack of intervention and sided with the parent.

Another pertinent federal law applying to public schools is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112, amended P.L. 93-516) aims to provide accommodations (e.g., note taker, extra time on tests) to people with disabilities to ensure that they receive equal opportunities and avoided discrimination (Sulkowski, Joyce, & Storch, 2012). It differs from IDEA because the disabilities do not have to follow a classification system; accommodations could address chronic or temporary issues (Sulkowski et al., 2012). Additionally, Sulkowski et al. (2012) wrote that similar to IDEA's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Section 504 provided students with an Individualized Accommodation Plan (IAP) where the services were specified. Bennett and Frank (2009) clarified the distinctions between both programs. IDEA guarantees special education services to students who meet the following criteria: must be between the ages of three and 21; have at least one of the 13 identified disabilities; and because of the disability not be making adequate educational progress. The 13 disabilities include autism; deaf-blindness; deafness; emotional disturbance; hearing impairment; intellectual disability; multiple disabilities; orthopedic impairment; other health impaired; specific learning disability; speech or language impairment; traumatic brain injury; or visual impairment (including blindness) (National

Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2012). A multidisciplinary team that includes a special education teacher, parent, administrator, general education teacher, and other specialists will make the determination if the student meets the qualifications to receive special education services.

The 504 plan is also for students with disabilities, but the major difference is that the student under the 504 plan is not impeded from succeeding academically due to his or her disability. The student just might need Assistive Technology (AT) to help with accessibility. Bennett and Frank (2009) illustrated this with an example. A student with cerebral palsy might not have any problem academically, but merely needs access to AT (e.g., wheelchair) in order to have easier access at the school campus.

Returning to Assistant Secretary Russlynn Ali's letter, she basically stated that school districts have the potential of violating students' civil rights when harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, and disability is serious enough that it creates a hostile environment. Furthermore, attention to this matter is not properly addressed (U.S. Dept. of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2010).

The United States Civil Rights Act of 1964 specifically stated that a hostile environment negatively affects students' ability to learn and will not be tolerated. Coloroso (2008) used an example of a relational sexual bullying incident that occurred in Minnesota. In this case a principal ignored a female student's request to remove sexually explicit material about her in the boys' bathroom. After two years of complaining and no action, this student decided to file a lawsuit against the school district. The case was settled for \$15,000. In New Jersey a school board agreed to pay a \$4.2 million settlement to a student who became paralyzed after a bully punched him (Leitsinger, 2012). In this case the middle school student had sent emails to his

school counselor as well as assistant principal before the attack that left him paralyzed, stating that he was being harassed and seeking guidance.

In Leander, Texas, a 20-year-old with Asperger's syndrome, a pervasive developmental disorder, sued the school district (Taboada, 2012). The young man claimed that he had been bullied since he was in middle school because of his disability. He further claimed that throughout his school years he informed teachers and administrators about the bullying, but the school district did very little to protect him. Not only did he become suicidal, but he has now been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well.

In 2011, the State of Texas passed several laws dealing specifically with bullying (SB 407; HB 1942; and HB 1386). House Bill 1942 is known as the "anti-bullying" bill. This bill deals specifically with bullying in public schools. Bullying is defined as written, verbal (including electronic means), and physical gestures that a school board determines will have a lasting negative effect on the student's education (Patrick et al., 2011).

Besides providing a definition for bullying, the authors of this bill also clarified certain terms. For instance, the authors described "electronic means" as using technology such as social networks (e.g., Facebook) to harass students. The term "harassment" is also defined as threatening harm to the body, using sexually intimidating behavior, causing physical damage to someone's property, forcing someone to be restrained, and harming someone to the point that it affects emotional well-being. Throughout the bill the authors made it known that school districts must implement research-based programs in order to prevent and intervene whenever bullying occurs. Also, this bill stated that an administrator can remove and transfer a bully from a classroom or campus as a disciplinary consequence. HB 1942 requires all staff (from custodians to teachers) to respond to and report any bullying incidents (Eriksen, 2012).

Another law dealing with bullying is House Bill 1386. However, this one deals specifically with suicide. Coleman, Farrar, Marquez, Alvarado, and Walle (2011) wrote that bullying leads to “increased levels of depression and anxiety and decreased levels of self-esteem” (p. 2). They said that bullying not only affects academic work, but more importantly, it also affects the students’ mental health.

Coleman et al. (2011) also emphasized that if a student who is victimized does not receive help, he or she might resort to violence or suicide. Therefore, this law stated that comprehensive suicide prevention programs must be implemented in public schools and that anyone who interacts with students (e.g., teachers, administrators, counselors, nurses, staff) must be trained to recognize suicidal risk factors as well as identify students who are being bullied.

One group targeted for bullying is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students. This bill recognized that and Coleman et al. (2011) stated that “youth who have or are perceived to have a certain sexual orientation are subject to pervasive discrimination, bullying, harassment, intimidation, and violence that puts their physical and mental health at risk,” (p. 1). In this legislation, the same definition of bullying and harassment from House Bill 1942 is provided. However, in this bill, “cyberbullying” is defined. It means “bullying, harassment, or intimidation that is done using electronic communication, including electronic media,” (p. 7).

In section 37.218 of Senate Bill 407 Watson and Hinojosa (2011) described the dangers and ramifications of minors sharing sexually-related visual material. They alluded to a connection between bullying/cyberbullying when images like these spread. They also wrote that besides bullying, someone could face legal consequences, removal from extracurricular

activities, and detriments to employment and educational opportunities. Again, the terms “bullying,” “cyberbullying,” and “harassment” were referred to.

Relevant Studies

In a study similar to this researcher’s, Espelage and Asidao (2001) interviewed 89 middle school students (6th, 7th, 8th grades) from three Midwestern schools. Their teachers identified the participants as bullies, victims, or neither. The teachers then sent permission forms to the parents. After the forms were signed the students were invited to complete a 30-minute survey. Interviews were conducted later. The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Some of the questions dealt with defining bullying, identifying where bullying takes place the most, explaining why students bullied and why victims were targeted, how the adults on campus managed bullying, and tips for addressing bullying on campus.

When asked why some students were bullied more than others, the majority of participants stated that the victims appeared physically different in some way. They also stated that behavior played a factor as well. When asked where bullying occurred the most, the participants noted that they observed it most in the hallways, cafeteria, locker rooms, restrooms, recess, in the classrooms, between periods, and outside the campus. Participants explained that bullying occurs mostly in places where no adult is watching or where nothing can be heard. When asked for suggestions to decrease bullying behavior, some participants suggested involving the bully in extracurricular activities, showing them positive attention, establishing a reward system for good behavior, following through with consequences for negative behavior, peer mediation, support groups, and counseling. Espelage and Asidao (2001) wrote that in order

to prevent and intervene against bullying, students need to understand and appreciate the differences amongst the student body.

In another phenomenological study of bullying, Willis and Griffith (2010) wanted to discover how 11 middle school boys coped with their bullying experiences. Through the use of open-ended semi-structured interviews they found three recurring themes emerge: meaning-making; self-transcendence; and nonviolently claiming personal power. Meaning-making involved the adolescent boys recognizing their feelings and thoughts and how they influenced their daily lives. For example, one boy declared that he recognized that his anger could get the best of him and that it could lead to negative consequences such as drug use and suicide. Self-transcendence involved the boys looking beyond themselves to heal. This included feeling empathy for others in similar situations, asking others for help, and getting involved in extracurricular activities such as trying new hobbies. Non-violently claiming personal power involved the two other themes in that the boys would use what they knew about themselves and their bullies to transform their thinking. For instance, Willis and Griffith (2010) provided the example of a boy realizing that the negative comments a bully said were not true; therefore, he learned to dismiss them and actually feel sorry for the bully's poor social skills. This in return had a positive and very empowering effect as the boy began to realize that he was in control of his own feelings.

Olweus (1993) conducted a nationwide study in Norway as well as another related study (the Bergen study) to learn more detailed information on the topic. A bully/victim questionnaire was administered to all elementary and middle schools in the country. Olweus found that one out of seven students was involved in a bullying incident, either as a bully or a victim. Olweus also found that bullying decreases as the grades increase. In other words, elementary students

reported a higher percentage of bullying incidents than the secondary students. This finding contradicted what other studies have found when determining that bullying peaks during the middle school years.

According to Olweus (1993), boys are more exposed to bullying than girls. This peaks during the middle school years. However, boys face more incidents of direct bullying while girls are more exposed to indirect bullying. The answers to the questionnaires concerning teachers' responses to bullying depicted that students felt that the teachers did nothing much to intervene against bullying. Similarly, students expressed that parents are mainly unaware when their child is either a victim of bullying or a bully, and that the topic of bullying is rarely discussed.

Carran and Kellner (2009) conducted a study of 407 students (6th to 10th grade) with serious emotional disturbance (SED) attending special education schools in order to find rates and types of bullying and victimization. After completing Olweus' 39-item Bullying Questionnaire, the results indicated that compared to the general U.S. population of average students, fewer students with SED participated as bullies. However, more girls with SED were victimized than boys with SED. Both boys and girls reported telling an adult at school about the bullying, but girls did so with more frequency, 64% as opposed to the boys' 45%.

In another study, Didden et al., (2009) found that cyberbullying was prevalent among students with developmental and intellectual disabilities. The authors found that there was a correlation between cyberbullying (*via* the Internet) and feelings of depression. Coloroso (2008) cited statistics found from a descriptive study on bullying requested by the Toronto Board of Education. Thirty-eight percent of students (fourth through eighth grade) in the special education program were bullied, compared to 18 % of the students in the general population. Additionally, the 11 to 12-year-olds saw a peak in bullying (middle school years).

Frisén et al., (2008) conducted a longitudinal study with 877 Swedish 13-year-olds (both genders). They filled out a questionnaire asking for their perceptions on bullying. When answering the question, “Why do you think children/adolescents are bullied?” the most common answer had to do with appearance (p. 110). For example, appearance included weight, physical attractiveness, height, and whether or not the student looked “different.” Another finding suggested that boys and girls define bullying differently. For instance, girls described indirect bullying more than boys did.

In Maunder et al.’s (2010) study, they found that bullying is perceived differently between students and the adults at their school (i.e., teachers, staff, counselors, administrators). For this reason the authors suggested that school personnel clearly define what bullying is before intervention programs could be successful. The results were taken from questionnaires administered to both the students and adults concerning several scenarios. The participants were asked whether or not that particular scenario was considered bullying and if so, how serious it was. Some of the results indicated that indirect behaviors were considered less serious and not bullying. Scenarios with females were considered more serious. School staff considered more scenarios as bullying than the students. However, Mishna (2004) found that sometimes children considered situations bullying that adults did not. Hence, this discrepancy in perception led to improper reactions to a negative behavior.

Qualitative Method

According to Creswell (2013), there are five main approaches of a qualitative research study: narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, and case study research. Furthermore, each qualitative research study has several types of approaches. For example, a narrative approach might use a biographical study, autoethnography, life history, or an oral

history. A phenomenological approach might include a hermeneutic or empirical/transcendental/psychological focus. A grounded theory includes the systematic procedures and constructivist approaches. The ethnography approach includes the realist and critical forms. Finally, types of case studies include a single instrumental, collective, and intrinsic case study.

For this study I used the phenomenological approach. According to Christensen and Brumfield (2010), this approach focuses on the subjective experiences of the participants. Furthermore, the goal of this approach is to understand the meaning behind the experience of whatever phenomenon (e.g., anger, homelessness) is being studied (Miller & Salkind, 2002). In this case the phenomenon being studied is bullying.

Number of participants determines the nature of the study (Newsome, Hays, & Christensen, 2008). According to Miller and Salkind (2002), eight to 10 participants are recommended for most qualitative studies. Creswell (2013) stated that no one researcher has a set number in phenomenological studies. For example, Polkinghorne (1989) recommended five to 25, but Polkinghorne has used up to 325 participants in a study. On the contrary, Wertz (1985) recommends a much smaller number, between one and six. Although Dukes (1984) has used one participant before, Dukes recommended three to 10 subjects. Mason (2010) explained that researchers should have enough participants to make sure diverse perceptions are uncovered; however, the concept of saturation must be followed. According to Mason (2010), saturation is when no new data is needed because the data already collected is enough for the researcher to make proper findings; any more information would just be redundant.

Contribution of the Study

This study adds a new dimension to other studies because it allows the readers (e.g., researchers, mental health professionals, administrators) to view bullying through the eyes of the actual student who is being bullied. Furthermore, a unique perspective is that the student who was discussing bullying was a middle school student in the special education program in a school district located in the Rio Grande Valley, a predominantly Mexican American-populated region in Texas. This study has relevance in the rehabilitation counseling field because students with disabilities who are bullied might find themselves in the same situation when they enter the employment sector as adults. If they do not learn the social skills needed to rebuff bullying or receive the support from the adults in their lives, bullying in the workplace can have similar detrimental effects it has for adolescents.

Summary

Chapter II described the studies that illustrated the magnitude that bullying has on adolescents. Addressed in this chapter were the findings that bullying does indeed have a negative impact on adolescents' emotional well-being. Also, it occurs heavily within the special education population as well as within the middle school years. However, what was less known in this field was the particular students' perspectives on this topic. Many quantitative studies have been conducted, but there are few qualitative studies. Additionally, narrowing the topic to students in the special education program was a new focus for a qualitative study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III described the research design as well as the procedures of the data collection and analysis. A description of the participants and the setting was also described. The researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board at The University of Texas-Pan American. To maintain confidentiality, participants did not have their names or other direct identifying information on any of the interviews published in the final publication.

Setting: The Rio Grande Valley

This study was carried out in eight middle schools within the Brownsville Independent School District (BISD) located in Brownsville, Texas. Brownsville is the largest city in the lower Rio Grande Valley, a region comprising of the southernmost tip of Texas. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Brownsville is the poorest city in America (Clark, 2013). U.S. Census Bureau (2011) numbers showed that the Brownsville population was estimated at 180, 097. Thirty-four percent of this population consisted of people below the age of 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In addition, the city is quickly growing and nearing 200,000 people (City of Brownsville, 2012). The “Valley” has four counties: Cameron (in which Brownsville is located), Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy. Although considered a tourist spot due to its close proximity to the Mexican border, Gulf of Mexico, and Rio Grande River, a couple (Hidalgo and Starr) of the counties in the Rio Grande Valley are considered some of the poorest in the country (Texas State

Historical Association, 2012). According to the Texas State Historical Association (2012), the poverty in the Rio Grande Valley is due to the overwhelming influx of legal and illegal immigrants from Mexico as well as Central America.

The majority of the Rio Grande Valley population is Mexican American. Brownsville has a high rate of unemployment as well as substandard neighborhoods known as colonias (Texas State Historical Association, 2012). Brownsville is on the border of Matamoros, Mexico (in the state of Tamaulipas). The Matamoros population exceeds 750,000 people (City of Brownsville, 2012). The Rio Grande River separates the two cities. Brownsville has also been featured in the national as well as international news due to political controversy concerning the border “wall”/fence that was built to prevent illegal immigrants from crossing the border (Armendariz, 2011). This is a region surrounded by poverty, unemployment, and political strife.

Participants

To be included in this study, participants needed to be middle school students (6th, 7th, 8th) within the BISD system. Also, at the time of the study, the participants were participating in the special education program. Finally, the last criteria to participate in this study included the participant having a personal experience with bullying that followed Olweus’ (1994) definition: the bullying experiences must be repeated over time, and not just a one-time event. The sample consisted of 25 adolescent participants (boys and girls) with the majority being Mexican American. The age range was 11 to 15 years old.

Procedure

Participants were recruited with the assistance of the school counselors. Each middle school in BISD has three counselors – one for each grade level (6th, 7th, 8th). A formal letter was distributed to the counselors at each school describing the study and its intent. The

researcher sent the criteria to each counselor. First, the student needed to be in the special education program. Second, the student must have experienced bullying. Third, the experience of being bullied must not have been a one-time incident, but rather one that was repeated in order to follow Olweus' (1994) definition of bullying. The third criteria was determined based on a student sharing an experience of bullying either to the counselor or another adult who brought this to the counselors' attention. In an effort to recruit more participants, the counselors shared these criteria with the staff of their campus.

To maintain confidentiality, the counselor did not release any names to the researcher until an informed consent was signed and returned to the counselor. The counselor also contacted the parent by telephone in case the student forgot to give the form to the parent. In this consent form the purpose of the study as well as examples of the interview questions were provided in order for the parent/guardian to make a more informed decision whether or not to allow his or her child to participate.

The consent forms for parents/guardians were offered in both English and Spanish. A professional translated the consent forms from English to Spanish. This translator received his bachelor of arts in Spanish translation and interpreting from the University of Texas at Brownsville.

After the consent form was signed and returned to the counselor, the researcher made an appointment to interview the student at his or her respective campus. Additionally, because the student was a minor, before interviewing the student, another consent form (assent; also provided in English and Spanish) was required to be signed in order to begin the interview.

Data Collection

Data was collected over a period of several days through semi-structured interviews with each participant. Prior to beginning the research, the study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. Permission was obtained from the Assessment, Research, and Evaluation Department from BISD. Additionally, each principal signed the "Principal Agreement to Participate Form" from the application for research study.

The researcher followed a common interview protocol and asked 13 questions that covered key areas. However, participants were also encouraged and given the opportunity to expand upon areas and to address topics not included in the interview protocol, but considered important by the participant. Examples of questions that specifically addressed the students' experiences with bullying included (a) What is your experience with bullying? (b) How do you cope/deal with being bullied? (c) Have any adults ever seen you bullied and, if so, what did they do?

Interviews lasted up to 45 minutes, depending on how detailed the students' responses were. All interviews were audiotaped on a microcassette recorder and transcribed verbatim with the participants' permission. All audiotapes and transcripts were reviewed to verify the accuracy of the transcription and make necessary changes prior to analysis if deemed necessary. The data was stored at The University of Texas–Pan American in the rehabilitation doctoral students' computer lab under lock and key (HSHW 1.276).

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using content analysis. The transcripts were read line by line and a code word describing each segment was assigned. Codes were clustered into categories and then abstracted into higher levels of symbolic meaning. Major themes were identified.

The researcher read the participants' entire transcript at least twice to begin to understand the experiences of all the participants. The researcher then began to reduce the data to gather general themes found in each transcript (Creswell, 2013). Hunt, Matthews, Milsom, and Lammel (2006) suggested using direct quotations in order "to capture the essence of each theme," (p. 166).

Noonan et al. (2004) recommended using a specific coding process. The first phase of data analysis involves open coding. The transcripts are broken down into small, distinct parts (e.g., a word, phrase). These small parts are called concepts. The next phase involves categories. Essentially, one label is used to describe several concepts. The next phase involves describing categories in terms of properties (the characteristics of a category) and dimensions (the location of a property on a continuum). Finally, selective coding is the phase of data analysis where one core category is chosen to describe "the essence of the participants' experiences," (Noonan et al., 2004).

The four criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) for maintaining trustworthiness in qualitative studies was sought. Christensen and Brumfield (2010) explained each criterion. The credibility criterion is used to ensure that the findings/conclusions are accurate. In this study triangulation as well as member checking was used to ensure credibility.

Transferability is the second criterion used to maintain trustworthiness. Transferability means that the data from this study can be applied to other settings (other middle schools). However, while the findings from one study can be applied to other settings, it should still be taken into account that every setting is unique. Therefore, the researcher needs to be as detailed and in-depth as possible in the final report of the findings.

The third criterion is dependability. Dependability is when the findings of a study are consistent no matter who the researcher or the time of the study is. This criterion seems to overlap with the credibility criteria. Triangulation with an experienced professor of special education and member checking become very important here as well to ensure dependable results. Finally, confirmability makes the assumption that the data is what is truly perceived by the participants, and not from any biases that the researcher has. It is suggested that the researcher relate any biases or opinions before the study begins. For instance, the authors suggested that the researcher describe professional or personal reasons for conducting the particular study.

Summary

Chapter III described the research design as well as the procedures of the data collection and analysis. A description of the participants and the setting was also described.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Chapter IV presented a discussion of the findings of this study. The discussion section explored the answers to the research questions as well as other important information.

This study examined the bullying experiences of middle school students in the special education program. The study consisted of 13 females and 12 males, a total of 25 students. They ranged in age from 11 to 15. Twenty-four participants were Mexican American (born in the United States), and one was Mexican (born in Mexico). Six types of disabilities were represented: autism; emotional disturbance (ED); intellectual disability (ID); other health impairment (OHI); specific learning disability (SLD); and speech or language impairment (SI). Of the 11 middle schools in BISD, eight schools had students that participated in this study. The following sections describe the participants' responses in detail, using direct quotations for illustrative purposes.

Table 1: Summary of Participant Demographics

Name *pseudonym	Sex	Age	Disability	Grade Level	Ethnicity
Anahi	Female	14	SLD	7th	Mexican American

Benito	Male	13	ID	6th	Mexican American
Christian	Male	14	SLD	7th	Mexican American
David	Male	13	unknown	7th	Mexican American
Erasmus	Male	12	SLD	6th	Mexican American
Giselle	Female	12	SLD	7th	Mexican American
Harley	Male	11	ED & SLD	6th	Mexican
Javier	Male	14	ED & SLD	7th	Mexican American
Jesse	Male	12	unknown	6th	Mexican American
Jocelyn	Female	13	SI & Autism	7th	Mexican American
Jose	Male	15	ED & SLD	7th	Mexican American
Karla	Female	14	SLD & SI	7th	Mexican American

Kimberly	Female	13	SLD	6th	Mexican American
Laura	Female	11	SLD	6th	Mexican American
Leslie	Female	14	ED	8th	Mexican American
Luis	Male	14	SLD	8th	Mexican American
Marcy	Female	13	ED	7th	Mexican American
Mark	Male	12	SLD & SI	6th	Mexican American
Nicole	Female	15	SI	8th	Mexican American
Priscilla	Female	12	SLD	6th	Mexican American
Raquel	Female	13	ID	7th	Mexican American
Ricardo	Male	14	Autism & OHI	8th	Mexican American
Sarah	Female	14	SLD	8th	Mexican American

Sebastian	Male	13	Autism & SI	7th	Mexican American
Yoli	Female	13	SLD	6th	Mexican American

13 Interview Questions

Bullying Description

The first question, “How would you describe bullying?” was used to capture the participants’ personal definition of bullying. Several action words and phrases were used such as, “making fun of someone,” “teasing,” “hurting someone’s feelings,” “pushing,” “threatening,” “when someone bothers you,” “when somebody just tries to mess with you,” “called names,” and “hitting me.” Some participants elaborated on their descriptions such as, “a ruthless, brutal thing,” “Bullying is everywhere. In the country, in school, outside of the school, in the streets,” “It’s kind of like violence,” and “Something that can harm not only me, but can also harm the person who is being the bully.” Others used simple adjectives to describe it such as, “dumb,” “not cool,” and “something not nice.” One participant responded with, “I don’t know.”

Bullying Experience

The second question, “What is your experience with bullying?” was used to elicit the core phenomenon of this study – how each participant experienced the same topic being studied. Their stories are illustrated here. All names have been changed to protect their identities.

Leslie, a 14-year-old 8th grader with emotional disturbance, discussed her experience of bullying. At the time of the interview she was attending an alternative school for misbehaving at her zoned campus. She mentioned that bullying was the real reason she was sent there. She said

that the frustration of being verbally attacked on a constant basis led her to lash out and fight back. Consequently, she was sent to the alternative school for fighting. However, she was still being bullied at the alternative school because of her physical appearance. “I had bullying here in school. Some kids called me changa (monkey) and they made me cry. They used to call me horse. They used to pick on me a lot, and now it doesn’t happen.” She shared that it stopped after her school counselor intervened. After speaking with the cadets (official name for students enrolled at that school), they told Leslie that they did not mean to hurt her that way. One cadet even told Leslie that he was just following the other students.

Ricardo, a 14-year-old 8th grader with autism as a primary disability and other health impairment as a secondary disability, spoke about being bullied since he was in 6th grade. He specifically spoke about his shoe constantly being taken during his gym class. “I have been bullied...uh...physically and mentally, emotionally. Uh, in 6th grade I was just doing what I usually do in gym. I change. I come back to the locker room. I change, but when I put on my shirt, I notice one of my shoes is missing. This happens three times. Each time I got my shoe back, but not in the way I would like it. One time it was in the toilet. Next time it was in the athletic cage. And the last time it was outside. I picked up the shoe and all the water came outside.”

Mark, a 12-year-old 6th grader with specific learning disability as a primary one and speech impairment as a secondary one, spoke about an incident where he got into trouble after bringing a wrench to school and using it to defend himself. During gym class there was one student who constantly harassed him by calling him bad words and pushing him. “When the kid bullied me he pulled the hood of my jacket and I pulled the wrench out of my pocket. And that’s when I tried to scare him. I had the wrench because I was working on a computer tower. Well, I

accidentally got a wrench in my pocket by accident.” He said that he chased the bully across the gym, but that he did not hit him. Mark had been crying because the adults (p.e. and special ed. teacher) were not sure to believe his story about accidentally having the wrench in his pocket. They felt that he brought it to school with the intention of using it as a weapon against his bully. However, Mark insisted that his version of the story was the truth.

Anahi, a 14-year-old 7th grader with specific learning disability, described her experience with verbal bullying. One boy used to call her bad words even though she would never tell him anything. One incident that embarrassed her occurred the day she wore a ring that had a frog on it. He asked her very meanly, “What the fuck is that?” The class started to laugh.

Raquel, a 13-year-old 7th grader with an intellectual disability, spoke about her experience with verbal bullying as well. She said that a large majority of students at her campus, even students not in her grade level, called her Lil Wayne (a rapper) because they felt that she looked like him. She felt humiliated because she knew this was not meant to be a compliment and she hated that. She told me, “I don’t want to come to school.”

Luis, a 14-year-old 8th grader with specific learning disability, discussed his transformation of being a victim of bullying into being a bystander that helped. “I’ve been bullied in 6th grade by another kid. He would always bother me by putting my head down. One day I confronted the bully and I just punched him in the stomach. I got in trouble with the principal because he told on me. I was in ISS (in school suspension) for three days.” Luis then explained how he recently helped out another student who was being bullied. “When I was walking through the hallways I saw another kid get bullied by another big kid. I told a teacher and the bully got in trouble. The kid said, ‘thanks for helping me,’ and I said, ‘don’t mention it.’”

Erasmio, a 12-year-old 6th grader with specific learning disability said, “I’ve been getting pushed and threatened and beatin’ up a little since the first day of school. One time a kid was asking me for money in the back of school during p.e. He rams at me like a bull and started punching me in the jaw.”

Harley, an 11-year-old 6th grader with emotional disturbance as a primary disability and specific learning disability as a secondary one said, “People making fun of me. Teasing me. Hitting me. I was in the gym dressing up and they just took my clothes. They threw it outside.”

Giselle, a 12-year-old 7th grader with specific learning disability said, “Sixth grade summer school. Yeah, there were these girls that started saying things to me. That they hated my guts. Yeah, that’s about it. They were just looking and hating.”

Yoli, a 13-year-old 6th grader with specific learning disability said, “I didn’t do nothing and they were bothering me and telling me bad things. Like I was how I talk. They were laughing about me how I was talking. They were always doing mean things. They were telling another boy ball because he was fat.”

Priscilla, a 12-year-old 6th grader with specific learning disability said, “I have like an 8th grader wanting to beat me up. Because she had said that she didn’t like me since the first time she saw me. There were two other girls too. One was because I liked the guy she liked too. She started calling me the b word.”

Bullying Effect

The third question, “What effect has it had on your life?” elicited several responses. Javier, a 14-year-old 7th grader with emotional disturbance as a primary disability and specific learning disability as a secondary one said, “Growing tougher.”

Ricardo said, “Well, bullying has more or less changed the way I would have seen a person. Now that I have been bullied, I, more or less, have some trust issues. I more or less have to get to know the person first, and then I would be able to trust them.”

Mark said, “It feels like I just want to get to finish school and maybe start a new life.”

Marcy, a 13-year-old 7th grader with emotional disturbance, said, “Well, now I am really scared, especially when I meet new people because it brings back memories that I have.”

Anahi said, “That if someone is bothering me I should defend me.”

Luis said, “Well, I was afraid of walking in the hallways because you never know if he might jump you or punch you in the face. So I was afraid to go to the hallways so I was always late to class.”

Laura, an 11-year-old 6th grader with specific learning disability said, “When they tell me something I think about it so much and I remember what they have done to me and I start thinking all this stuff. Like what they tell me I start thinking because they tell me, ‘No, you have to change.’ I don’t really do it, but I start thinking, ‘Should I change or not?’”

Jesse, a 12-year-old 6th grader with an unidentified disability said, “Very bad. Like on focusing on work, worrying a lot.”

Kimberly, a 13-year-old 6th grader with specific learning disability said, “It causes me a little bit of depression, even been a little down lately. When I dream or go to sleep it gives me bad nightmares. If it happens what will I do again? It makes you more confident because you know it’s not true.”

Harley said, “Just made me sad, not that confident anymore.”

Giselle said, “I defend myself more. Like I really don’t really like to talk to people much. I’m not really a social person.”

Priscilla said, “Not liking boys that have girlfriends.”

Feelings

The fourth question, “How do you feel when you get bullied?” also elicited several responses. Leslie said, “I feel upset, depressed. I don’t eat. I cry a lot. I start reacting bad in a way that I start getting in fights and it puts me down.”

Jose, a 15-year-old 7th grader with emotional disturbance as a primary disability and specific learning as a secondary one said, “Mad. I want to cry. Embarrassed.”

Javier said, “Alright cuz I tell them stuff back.”

Ricardo said, “Well now it has more or less died down, but when I’m bullied it makes me feel little, weak, insignificant, angry, sad, and sorry.” When I asked him what he meant by sorry he elaborated. “I say sorry because in all reality when they are done I think back to why they have bullied me because like it’s either because they can’t accept me or they have fun bullying people and that’s just wrong and sad.”

Karla, a 14-year-old 7th grader with specific learning disability as a primary one and speech impairment as a secondary one said, “Angry. Sad.”

Mark said, “When I get bullied it feels like it’s taking something out of my heart and I don’t like it. It feels like I want to say to them back what they said.”

Marcy said, “I feel scared, sad, anxious. Sometimes I even feel angry because I can’t do anything about it because it won’t ever stop.”

Anahi simply said, “Bad.”

Nicole, a 15-year-old 8th grader with speech impairment said, “Weird, like sad cuz I don’t really have nobody with me.”

Benito, a 13-year-old 6th grader with intellectual disability said, “I feel sad, guilty. Guilty because like bullying they always pick on you and then you get embarrassed.”

Luis said, “It makes you feel like a wimp. You are like a little small person and they are like the big person, so basically you are like their toy. They’ll just mess around with you, bother you, do all kinds of bad stuff to you.”

Sebastian, a 13-year-old 7th grader with autism as a primary disability and speech impairment as a secondary one said, “I feel like I just want to punch someone in the face.”

Laura said, “I feel sad sometimes because I think about what they told me. I think about it a lot.”

Jesse said, “Sad and a little bit nervous.”

David, a 13-year-old 7th grader with an unidentified disability said, “I feel really terrible and I get frustrated. I try to tell my parents what happened and then they send me to the counselor’s office to explain how this happened. And then my parents want me to kick them out of there so I won’t see them again. Yeah, I know, bullies are a disease to me.”

Kimberly said, “Sometimes when I get bullied I feel unwanted and a little bit sad than usual. But other times when I see or feel bullied I tell myself there is nothing to worry about. It is just their opinion, but when I see people get bullied it makes me feel sorry for that person because you don’t want people to go through what you went through.”

Harley said, “Sad. Lonely.”

Purpose of Bullying

The fifth question, “What do you think the purpose of bullying is?” was meant to gather what the participants felt was the reason bullying occurred. Leslie said, “Because they want to

think that they are cool. They want to look nice to other people. They want to think they are tough. They want to get their own way.”

Jose said, “Kids, they don’t have a reason to do it, so they just bother other kids.”

Ricardo said, “In my opinion people bully to make themselves feel good about themselves or just to be mean. And in some ways I believe it helps the bully cope with something they are mad about in their own lives and they just take it out on their victim.”

Mark said, “It is either they got it from their parents because they have been mean to them or they did it because they want to feel like they are doing a little project to either suicide them or make them feel upset.”

Marcy said, “I think the purpose of bullying is when a person is struggling they just don’t know how to deal with it so they think the only way to get out their emotions is by making others feel how they feel.”

Anahi said, “Because they feel bad in their house or they feel alone.”

Nicole said, “Cuz they want to laugh about other people, to make comments about them.”

Benito said, “They think they’re all that and they think it’s cool to bully.”

Luis said, “I think all bullies are just wimps. They try to act cool. They think they are all that. Sometimes they hang out with their groups so they can act tougher, but when they are alone they are like, ‘What do I do?’”

Sebastian said, “What I’ve learned so far from all these years of bullying...the only reason they are being bullies is because they have a pretty rough life and they are trying to fit in with the world, but in the wrong way. For example, say a kid, gets his favorite dream smashed and then he becomes a bully. No one can say why he became a bully. And some who say it...they just say it is for kicks.”

Sarah, a 14-year-old 8th grader with specific learning disability said, "It's cuz they might think they are strong or like they like to hurt people who are the low self-esteem. Seeing people like different kinds."

Laura said, "I think that it's because they are having problems at home and it bothers them."

Jesse said, "Kids who have been bullied before so they think they can bully and they think they are all cool for bullying."

David said, "Because these kids (victims) were like nerds or small people and nobody's."

Jocelyn, a 13-year-old 7th grader with speech impairment as the primary disability and autism as the secondary one said, "Because they being neglected from their parents or abuse."

Kimberly said, "My opinion is that bullying can be caused by parents. At home maybe because when their parents fight, if they hear bad words, maybe they use it at school. They take out their angers on other kids."

Erasmus said, "It's that maybe I'm too little and too kind and they want me to get angry."

Harley said, "Just to think that they are better than themselves."

Christian, a 14-year-old 7th grader with specific learning disability said, "Just to make fun of people, I guess."

Giselle said, "They envy you."

Yoli said, "Because they don't have a good life."

Priscilla said, "Because they want attention. Maybe they don't get attention at home and they want to get the attention now."

Reaction to Bullying

The sixth question, “How do you react when you get bullied?” was asked to find out what actions were taken after a bullying incident occurred. Leslie stated, “I start getting in fights. I start fighting with the sergeants. I start running away. I commit a Code 3 (run away) or a Code 1 (fight).”

Jose said, “Mad, like if I want to punch the person.”

Javier said, “Angry.”

Ricardo said, “At first I would just try...when I was young I would just try and bully back to defend myself. I now know how to let the words just pass over me like water over stone, but the physical bullying or the bullying itself like to a certain point then I would tell an adult.”

Karla said, “Angry. I tell the teachers.”

Mark said, “I act like if no one is going to be hanging around with me. I act like if I feel alone.”

Marcy said, “Well, sometimes I just leave myself out of other people’s way or I just hide because I feel so ashamed about myself. Or sometimes I just confront the greatest fear I have in my life. Or sometimes I just walk away and just like, uh, go to the restroom and start crying.”

Benito said, “Scared.”

Sebastian said, “I try my best to ignore it, but eventually if I’m having a bad day and I get bullied then eventually I’ll snap and scream so loud that just instantly everyone is scared of me.”

Laura said, “I react angry; sad too.”

Jesse said, “I tell the adults.”

David said, “I react like this, ‘Hey, why don’t you just leave me alone and knock it off? I’m gonna have to ask the principal and maybe tear you a new one, bigger than the Grand Canyon.’”

Kimberly said, “My parents always told me when you get bullied or someone says mean things to you, always go to a teacher. I stand up for myself. But I say it in a nice way. I don’t scoop up to their level.”

Harley said, “I don’t react. I just ignore it.”

Giselle said, “Mad. I talk back.”

Coping and Dealing

The seventh question, “How do you cope/deal with being bullied?” was meant to find out how they take care of themselves after experiencing bullying. Leslie said, “I just write a statement and give it to the counselor. I discuss it with her and if it settles I’m fine. If it doesn’t, then there is another way to resolve that problem.”

Ricardo said, “Me, it’s more or less two-way process. I start to exercise and that helps me more or less forget about it, but if that does not help, I just try to talk it out.”

Mark said, “I would deal with bullying by telling a teacher or watch how it started and tell the teacher how it starts and ends so the teacher can punish the student and the student can go to BAC (Brownsville Academic Center) or either juvie.”

Marcy said, “Either I talk to a counselor, my parents, or an adult that I know and trust.”

Anahi said, “I don’t do nothing.”

Nicole said, “Run away.”

Benito said, “Tell the teacher.”

Raquel said, “We go talk to the principal, assistant principal, and the counselor.”

Luis said, “First, I just say, ‘Hey, can you leave me alone? If not, I’ll take drastic action.’”

Sebastian said, “By playing video games to the extreme and so that I can relieve myself from my anger because my hands get sore afterwards.”

Sarah said, “For me I will always have something around me to take it off. Like if I need a friend who can comfort me, to tell me the things to do, like tell me the things that are not important or are important. Like a best friend or like a sister or like a brother or even like a mom or father.”

Laura said, “I talk to an adult.”

David said, “I tell them to stop bullying. And then we shake hands. And then we can promise to never bully ever again.”

Jocelyn said, “I would tell the teacher.”

Kimberly said, “By ignoring it. When someone calls me names I ignore it. I pretend that no one is there. Sometimes I do this little trick like, ‘I can’t hear you.’ Sometimes it gets them more mad, but I just know it’s not true.”

Erasmo said, “Telling the counselor and mostly telling the principal.”

Harley said, “I just talk to someone, my friends about it. Tell somebody.”

Both Jose and Christian had similar responses. Jose said, “I’m not sure,” and Christian stated, “I don’t know.”

Giselle said, “I write. I just write in a journal and I throw it and write again.”

Yoli said, “Like telling someone.”

Priscilla said, “I guess being a bigger person and walking away.”

Interventions

The eighth question, “What do you think should happen to bullies?” was meant to find out what the participants think should occur to someone who has been bullying. Some participants had a retributive approach, while the others offered a more compassionate stance. Leslie said, “They should get pressed charges and they should get another 45 term here. They should report it to the law. They should take it off Facebook. They should take it off Internet because that’s when they start getting bullied. I experienced that because I had Facebook and they used to call me a lot of things on Facebook and I deleted it.”

Javier said, “Someone should kick their asses.” Luis held a similar position. “Well, they should all get their asses kicked.”

Karla said, “They should send them to BAC.”

Nicole said, “They should send to the ISS or like to send to boot camp.”

Raquel said, “To be in a room and give them a lot of work.”

David said, “The bullies should get arrested for doing such a thing or maybe sent to the Brownsville Academic Center. And maybe they should press charges against them and then the counselors will notify the parents.”

Erasmo said, “I think they should go to those prisons where they get bullied. Like those kids where they drink and do drugs.”

Harley said, “They should get a punishment. Out of school suspension, BAC.”

Priscilla said, “Be punished.”

There were a couple of responses that were not as retributive, but they still wanted the bullies to be aware of their behavior. For example, Jose said, “Like face what they are doing wrong.” Anahi said, “To stop them or say something to them.”

A couple of responses also used a creative approach. For example, Jesse said, “They should start a campaign and interview him for a t.v. show, the real kids, like who are being bullied. They should interview them and see about their life. They should put it in the t.v. and show that people are bullying.” Giselle had a very similar approach to Jesse. Giselle said, “They should be interviewed like why they do that, basically.”

Then there were the responses that were more compassionate toward the bully. For instance, Ricardo said, “Well, for their actions I think they should be punished, but I also think they should be helped.” He further explained what he meant by ‘helped.’ “In my mind, bullies are just men or women or just plain kids who are angry, frustrated, or have a problem, and they need help working that problem out, but they don’t know how. But if they are given the help, maybe they can stop.”

Mark had a similar response as Ricardo. “Well, one thing for sure is that the bullies must know what’s right or wrong. If they don’t, they will end up just like the other kids that are here. They will get the same lives and they don’t want to do that.”

Marcy said, “I think they should go to a rehab so they can notice what they are doing, to at least deal with the problems they have, to make more friends instead of make more enemies.”

Sebastian said, “They be called to the counselor’s office so the counselor can find out why they are being a bully and if that doesn’t work then the counselor should call the parents and ask a few questions and see what happens. ‘Why is your child like this?’”

Sarah said, “Bullies, well, they should see what is going on with them. They need to see how they are so they can change and tell people how sorry they were all these years to them.”

Laura said, “I think the adults should take care of them. Like talk to them to stop what they are doing.”

Jocelyn said, “I think that they should be forgiven just because they have been abused by their parents or neglected.”

Kimberly said, “Bullies are people like us. They just have different feelings. They just see differently from what we see. But if they are going to take out their anger on kids they should at least talk to a counselor and talk their feelings out. It’s always the parents that influence the kids to be bad.”

Setting

The ninth question, “Where do you get bullied the most?” was asked to find out where (what locations) bullying occurred the most. Leslie said, “In campus (home campus), in schools. The classes.” Jose said, “At school – hallways, classrooms, lunch.”

Javier said, “In the cafeteria, I think.”

Ricardo said, “At school. At school I am around more kids and that causes or that leaves the opportunity for them to bully as soon as the adults look away.” When asked to specify specific locations he offered, “The locker rooms and halls. The locker rooms are like a place where like the coach is not really there. He is more or less in his office or outside in the gym. And so they really have no adult to stop them. In the hallways that’s just a big pile of kids. You won’t...adults would really have to focus hard to see this little group of kids in this giant pond of people. It would be hard for them to see one kid getting bullied in this entire flood wave of kids.”

Karla said, “At class.”

Mark said, “I get bullied the most in school, which is here, and sometimes around houses. Outside. Yes.”

Marcy said, “It’s here at school. In the hallways. Or sometimes in class, but rarely. It happens the least outside.”

Anahi said, “In the school. When the teacher is not there in the classroom.”

Nicole said, “In school, like when you’re walking in the halls.”

Benito said, “At school. In the halls.”

Raquel said, “Aqui (here) in school. In the courtyard.”

Luis said, “The hallways. Sometimes outside where there is no security or nothing.”

Sebastian said, “Here in school. All over campus.”

Laura said, “At school – at class.”

Jesse said, “Sometimes at my house (my brother).”

David said, “At the cafeteria. When I was about to sit down someone just stole my seat.”

Kimberly said, “I guess in school. I get bullied sometimes during second period because the girls there. I get bullied in the hallway. In p.e. during sixth period. A little bit in lunch when the girls come by. They say names. Sometimes when I’m walking with a friend they say mean things. Some of the students that I know during second period there are these girls that say mean words in Spanish. They call me like the ‘b’ word of the opposite of pretty. They say that I’m a goodie-two shoes, which I’m not. Other girls say, ‘You are different.’ One of them calls me ‘four-eyes’ because I have glasses. Another says, ‘Nobody likes you.’ Another says that I’m ‘unwanted,’ and that I should ‘jump off a bridge.’ Sometimes the girls say, ‘Pinche puta (fucking bitch).’ One guy says I’m ‘the ugliest girl he has ever seen.’ I guess everywhere in school.”

Erasmus said, “At school mostly. In the back, at the playground...whatever.”

Harley said, “In the gym, walking in the hallway, and when I’m walking outside to go to class. Just when I’m walking outside they push me and throw me to the ground.”

Giselle said, “School. Classes.”

Yoli said, “In the hallways and sometimes when I get out of fourth period because I go to lunch.”

Priscilla said, “School. The hallways.”

Time

The tenth question, “When do you get bullied the most?” was meant to find out if there was a specific or certain time frame when bullying occurred. Leslie said, “When I’m doing my work or when we’re talking.”

Jose said, “Outside when I’m playing with my friends.”

Ricardo said, “When I get bullied the most is probably when there is no adult around to watch the kids or to prevent the bullying cuz everyone knows like the bully is not going to take action if the adult is there to punish them until the adult leaves and do what they want to do.”

Mark said, “For school I get bullied the most in p.e., which is gym class.”

Marcy said, “Well, I’ve noticed that when I get bullied the most it will be around 11 to three, but then when I look again, it’s probably because there is a lot of hatred, so they just don’t know what to do with themselves.”

Anahi said, “Outside when nobody is there.”

Nicole said, “When I’m with my friends, some girls tell me things. They talk about us.”

Benito said, “Like every day.”

Raquel said, “Every time.”

Luis said, “After school when I’m leaving.”

Sebastian said, “Whenever I try talk with people they just say, ‘Get the f away from me.’”

Sarah said, “Honestly most people tell me like every day.”

Jesse said, “Whenever I’m going to the kitchen to get food. Like whenever I go to make a sandwich someone will hit me with his elbow.”

Kimberly said, “During first period science, second period English, third period in technology, and also sixth period p.e., and seventh period which is math. And sometimes ninth period in choir.”

Erasmus said, “Mostly I think in third period (p.e.) and ninth period (p.e.). I got a schedule change.”

Harley said, “Between third and seventh period cuz there is no security. They are always inside and sometimes I don’t see them.”

Giselle said, “The whole school practically. Actually every period.”

Yoli said, “Often in the hallways.”

Priscilla said, “Going to fourth period because she has dance in the same area that I have.”

Quantity of Anxiety

The eleventh question, “How often do you worry about getting bullied?” was asked to find out how much or little the participants thoughts’ were consumed by worrying. Leslie, Jose, Anahi, Laura, Jesse, and Kimberly all made the same comment, “A lot.”

Javier said, “None.”

Ricardo explained, “It’s a daily basis kind of thing because now since we’re set up in different classes, like different classes every single day, you have like all these different bullies

that you can have in all your classes. And in some of your classes you can have more than one bully. You can have the bully you had in first period, in third period, and the bully you have in ninth all there for you. Or in elementary it was just, ‘Okay, I have only this class. This is the only bully.’ But now with all the alternate classes you have like eight different bullies that you can have in like eight different class periods. And in lunch you have every single one of those bullies right there. One, the food is bad. And two, you have all these people that can shove that food down your throat (he chuckles).”

Mark said, “Like eight or nine on a scale out of 10.”

Marcy said, “Well, it’s mostly when I go somewhere new and I don’t know much people. The year that is coming up I worry that I will get bullied like the year in my other school.”

Nicole said, “Nothing cuz when I get bullied I run away from the situation and tell the principal or the teacher.”

Benito said, “Maybe they will beat me up and stab me or knife me. Yeah, I worry a lot.”

Raquel said, “One day or two days.”

Luis said, “Well, I really don’t worry about getting bullied at all.”

Sebastian said, “All the time.”

Sarah said, “I don’t worry anything. Like for bullying I don’t worry because I know that the people who tell me, it won’t bother me. Like I have friends who can stick up for me and I can stick up for them. Bullying is like nothing to me. It just makes it the way how they are. And people just want attention. That’s what bullies are.”

David said, “When I get bullied some of the bullies just ask me to bring some money for tomorrow. If I don’t they tell me they will break my legs. I worry in my thoughts.”

Erasmus said, “A lot. I worry a lot.”

Harley said, “I always check my behind, sides, make sure they are not coming.”

Christian said, “Never. No, because I wouldn’t let myself.”

Giselle said, “Not much.”

Yoli shared the same sentiment as Giselle. “Not too much.”

Priscilla said, “Not that often.”

Disclosure to Adults

The twelfth question, “Do you ever tell anyone, like an adult, when you get bullied? If so, who do you tell?” was asked to find out whether or not the participants are confiding to an adult about their bullying experiences.

Leslie said, “Yes, I tell my folder teacher, the counselor, and the sergeants.”

Jose said, “Sometimes. My mom or my dad.”

Javier said, “Nobody.”

Ricardo said, “Yeah, I always tell the adult when I am bullied. It always either stops the problem or delays it. The adults I usually tell are my parents, the principal, a teacher, a counselor, especially my BI (behavioral intervention) teachers, or a security officer.”

Karla said, “Teachers.”

Mark said, “Well, mostly I don’t tell an adult when I get bullied. I just keep it inside of me, but I sometimes need to tell someone inside my head because if I don’t, that anger inside of me will rush out.”

Marcy said, “Well, I usually don’t tell them a lot, but when it’s like making me too depressed I usually tell my parents, the principal, or the counselor to see what they can do about it.”

Anahi said, “Um, your friend or the teacher.”

Nicole said, “Yes, my teacher and then she talks to the person to stop bullying me.”

Benito said, “I tell my mom and my dad.”

Raquel said, “Like the securities; my mom.”

Luis said, “Everybody. My parents, the teachers, and the principal.”

Sebastian said, “Yes, I do tell. I tell my mom.”

Sarah said, “If I ever did I would probably tell my parents – my dad and my mom. But I don’t tell them anything because I know that every day I come home I don’t feel sad or hurt. I don’t feel nothing. What’s the point of being bullied because they won’t stop. They will keep on going and going and going. It’s just like being hurt by like a different person by another person. It will just keep on going and never stop.”

Laura said, “I tell my parents and the counselor at school.”

Jesse said, “Yes, my mom or my dad.”

David said, “Yes, my dad.”

Jocelyn said, “My parents or a teacher.”

Kimberly said, “I don’t tell teachers because I know they don’t do anything about it. I mostly tell my dad and then I tell my mom. My dad is more helpful in these things because he also got bullied as a kid in California. My mom tells me to just walk away, but when I do, they just keep doing it.”

Erasmo said, “I tell the principal. I tell the counselor. I tell my mom. Sometimes I tell my friends.”

Harley said, “I don’t tell anybody because I’m afraid they’ll come and get me back.”

Christian said, “My parents.”

Giselle said, “Nobdoy.”

Yoli said, "To my parents."

Priscilla said, "One of my health teachers."

Witness to Bullying

The thirteenth question, "Have any adults ever seen you bullied and, if so, what did they do?" was asked to find out if an adult was told about the bullying, what actions or inactions he or she took.

Leslie said, "Yes, ma'am. They took out that student and talked with them."

Jose said, "They've never seen me bullied."

Javier said, "Nobody has seen me bullied."

Ricardo said, "Um...many adults have seen me bullied. Whenever this happens they always...uh...get after the bully and get me away from them to make sure that as soon as they look away that won't happen again."

Marcy said, "No, the teachers, um...usually it happens when there is too many kids around to see who is getting bullied."

Anahi said, "They get them a referral."

Nicole said, "Mmhmm...when my teacher saw me that this girl was trying to get in a fight with me. She ran quickly and defend me. She got in the middle and then she called out to get the security to take her to the office. And then told me if, 'I was okay,' and I said, 'yes.'"

Benito said, "Yeah, they come and they handle the problems what's going on here."

Sebastian said, "Yes, when my cousin, Sergio, tried to choke me and before we left for the game, the coach talked to him and talked to me and asked if I wanted to press charges. And if I did he would be expelled from the team, but I didn't."

Laura said, "They tell them to stop and they separate them from me."

Yoli said, “Teachers. They tell the principal and they talk about what happened to me and then they call them and tell them not to do it again.”

Harley said, “Mhmm...in sixth period they were just calling me names. The substitute was there and she didn’t do nothing about it.”

Kimberly said, “No. They are never around when I do get bullied. I don’t have a witness or anybody next to me to say the truth that I was getting bullied.”

Erasmus said, “They haven’t seen, but I tell. Maybe write referrals for them.”

Jesse said, “Nobody.”

Giselle said, “Nope.”

David said, “No, they haven’t.”

Raquel, Luis, Christian, and Priscilla just said, “No.”

This study examined the bullying experiences of 25 middle school students. The thirteen questions allowed the students to respond in detail by describing their own personal experience with bullying. From 25 verbatim transcripts, multiple statements were extracted.

Table 2 includes examples of significant statements with their formulated meanings. Arranging the formulated meanings into clusters resulted in eight themes: humiliation; transformation – for better or worse; gaining insight; retribution; compassion; taking action or lack thereof; awareness; and constant worrying. Table 3 contains two examples of theme clusters that emerged from their associated meanings. The researcher received approval of these theme clusters by an educational psychology professor who specializes in special education and bullying issues.

Table 2: Selected Examples of Significant Statements of Students Who Have Experienced Bullying and Related Formulated Meanings

<i>Significant Statement</i>	<i>Formulated Meaning</i>
“Bullying has more or less changed the way I would have seen a person. Now that I have been bullied, I, more or less, have some trust issues.”	The bullying phenomenon can transform a once trusting individual to someone who has lost faith in humankind.
“It makes you feel like a wimp. You are like a little small person and they are like the big person, so basically you are like their toy.”	Bullying makes you feel so insignificant that you don’t even feel like a whole human being anymore. You just feel like an inanimate object that can be messed with at someone’s discretion.
“When I was young I would just try and bully back to defend myself. I now know how to let the words just pass over me like water over stone.”	As people age and mature, they can learn how to cope with bullying by realizing that it is not about them, but in fact, it is really the bullies’ issue to deal with.
“For their actions I think they should be punished, but I also think they should be helped.”	Bullies should face consequences; however, they should also learn the skills to act more appropriately so they won’t continue their negative behavior.

Table 3: Examples of Two Theme Clusters With Their Associated Formulated Meanings

<i>Humiliation</i>	<i>Transformation – for better or worse</i>
Laughing at other's expense	Lack of trust
Making someone cry	Wanting to start over – a new life
Depression	Fear
Loss of appetite	Question of changing one's identity
Anger	Despair
Low self-esteem	Anger
Crushing someone's soul	Confidence
Anxious	Learning new coping skills

Theme 1: Humiliation. Focusing on negative aspects of their personal experiences with bullying was the pervading element for many of the participants. Leslie described her verbal attacks against her physical appearance as demeaning. Students constantly called her changa and horse. These statements hurt so much that she often cried.

Ricardo discussed his constant gym class experiences. His shoe would repeatedly disappear from the locker room and subsequently be found in locations such as outside and even the toilet. Anahi remembered how a boy would constantly embarrass her in class by calling her bad words and insulting her tastes in fashion. The class would laugh at the boy's statements. Marcy said that she felt ashamed after an attack and would go to the restroom to cry.

Luis's humiliation was clear: "It makes you feel like a wimp. You are like a little small person and they are like the big person, so basically you are like their toy. They'll just mess around with you, bother you, do all kinds of bad stuff to you." A toy is how he compares himself, an inanimate object who is unable to take control of its well-being. Complete powerlessness. His description paints an image of a kid throwing around a rag doll, with no respect for its value. This is how Luis sees himself. Pure humiliation.

Theme 2: Transformation – for better or worse. In this theme, participants focused on how bullying changed them negatively and positively. Responding quickly and spontaneously, their transformation was described as "growing tougher," "defend myself more," "I stand up for myself," "I feel alone," and "I'll snap and scream." Others discuss becoming more distrustful of others, dealing with anxiety. One participant even went so far as to say that he wanted to start a new life, like his current life was meaningless due to the constant bullying.

Many participants spoke about their extreme anger and fear – emotions that they had never felt so intensely until being bullied. Luis stated that he was so afraid to walk in the hallways because he never knew when his bully would attack. This fear caused him to constantly be late for his classes. Others spoke about their sadness. Kimberly used the word "depression," to describe how bullying affected her. Harley said, "Just made me sad, not that confident anymore. Ricardo also used an analogy to describe his growth. He spoke about how he used to bully back to defend himself when he was younger; however, now he knows how to "let the words just pass over me like water over stone."

Theme 3: Gaining Insight. The participants really thought about the purpose of bullying and came up with multiple conclusions. Many recognized that the act of bullying possibly had deeper roots rather than simply a student wanting to be mean.

For example, several participants stated that they felt that the bullies' home life had a factor in the bullying behavior. Mark believed that the bullies learn this negative behavior from their parents. Kimberly made the same conclusion. "At home maybe because when their parents fight, if they hear bad words, maybe they use it at school."

Both Ricardo and Marcy felt that the bullying behavior was a coping mechanism that the bullies learned in order to deal with their own problems stemming from their own family situations. Sebastian stated that bullies "have a pretty rough life." Laura said bullies "are having problems at home, and it bothers them." Priscilla felt that bullies don't get attention at home, so they then seek it at school.

While many of the participants felt bullying had deeper roots that stemmed at home, others felt that the bullies were simply acting that way just to be mean. Nicole said that the bullies just wanted to laugh at others. Luis felt that bullies thought they were acting cool when they bullied. Harley said bullying made bullies feel better about themselves.

Theme 4: Retribution. Some of the participants believed that bullies should be punished for their behavior. Leslie believed that she should be able to press charges against her bullies. However, Javier and Luis offered a more retaliatory approach. Javier said, "Someone should kick their asses." Others felt they should be placed in alternative sites such as BAC (Brownsville Alternative Center), ISS (in school suspension), and out of school suspension.

Theme 5: Compassion. While all the participants had been targeted in some way, there were still those that looked beyond their own pain and felt pity for the bully. For instance, Ricardo felt there should be culpability; however, he also felt that bullies should be helped. "If they are given the help, maybe they can stop."

Mark and Marcy held similar positions as Ricardo. Mark felt that the bullies needed to learn what was right and wrong so that they would not continue the same negative behavior. Marcy felt that the bullies should get support to learn how to deal with their problems, and apply their new social skills for gaining friends instead of hurting others.

Jocelyn felt that forgiveness was the answer to dealing with bullies because she thought that there were underlying issues that stemmed from abuse and neglect. Kimberly believed that bullies' perceptions were warped, but that if they sought help from a counselor, they could start to heal their own pain; thus, making more positive choices when interacting with their peers. Sebastian also felt that having the bully talk with a counselor could help them work on his or her negative behavior.

Theme 6: Taking Action or Lack thereof. There were some participants who did not take action when being bullied; however, the majority of the participants did tell an adult about their problem with bullying. Most confided in their parents, while others also included telling an adult at school.

Ricardo stated that he always tells an adult, and that his assertiveness usually leads to the problem ending or at least delaying it while it is being dealt with. On the other hand, Kimberly said that she did not tell her teachers because she felt like they did not do anything about it. However, she would tell her parents because she felt like they were more understanding, especially since her father experienced bullying as a child.

Theme 7: Awareness. The participants were aware of many factors involved in the bullying phenomenon that they had experienced. It ranged from the definition of bullying to where it occurred the most. For instance, when asked how they would describe bullying, many

used negative terms to describe it (e.g., teasing and threatening). All participants were aware that bullying was harmful behavior.

As far as the setting, the students were very aware that bullying occurred the most at school. They even got very specific and stated that it occurred the most in the hallways, locker rooms, classrooms, and the cafeteria. Another observation they were aware of is that bullying mostly happened when there was no adult supervision. On the same note the participants were aware that the bullies were savvy enough to not bully when adults were around because they did not want to get into trouble for their behavior.

However, if by chance an adult did witness the bullying, the participants were also aware that the majority of time action would be taken. Specifically, the adult would intervene on behalf of the student being bullied. Examples were given where teachers would reprimand the bullies and report them to the proper personnel on campus.

Theme 8: Constant Worrying. Anxiety was a constant in the participants' lives. "A lot" was the phrase used by many. The anxiety ranged from the constant worrying of anticipating the next bullying event to acting hypervigilant. For example, Harley said, "I always check my behind, sides, make sure they are not coming." On a similar note, Benito stated, "Maybe they will beat me up and stab me or knife me."

Discussion

In this study, middle school students in the special education program who have experienced bullying helped to answer the three research questions asked in this study: (1) What meaning do special education middle school students ascribe to their experiences with bullying?; (2) How do these students cope with bullying?; and (3) What interventions do these students suggest might be helpful in dealing with bullying? The core phenomenon that emerged was a

story about the intense meaning and importance of bullying in the lives of middle school students in the special education program. The intensity with which these participants described bullying often shocked and enlightened this researcher, who has had knowledge of and experience working with adolescents in the special education program for nearly 11 years.

How would you describe bullying?

On this question the majority of participants responded by describing verbal bullying. According to Coloroso (2008), 70% of reported bullying involves this type. Only a few participants responded by describing physical bullying. Physical bullying occurs less than one-third of the time compared to the other forms (Coloroso, 2008). None of the participants described relational, cyber, or sexual bullying.

What is your experience with bullying?

On this question all participants described experiences either with verbal or physical bullying. However, the majority of their experiences were with verbal bullying. Again, this coincides with Coloroso's (2008) explanation that verbal bullying is the most common form of bullying.

What effect has it had on your life?

A variety of psychosocial factors were described. Some participants described being depressed. Depression is related to bullying (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpelae, & Rantanen, 2001; Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagle, & Mickelson, 2001; Szalavitz, 2012). Some said that they worried a lot. According to Olweus (1993), anxiety is also related to bullying. Others described having trust issues and not being confident. Low self-esteem and social development are related to bullying (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Piskin, 2002). Grades can also be affected negatively (Graham, Bellmore, & Mize, 2006; Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & Toblin, 2005) just as one

participant described not being able to focus on work. Although most responded by describing negative effects, a few described positive ones. For instance, some participants said that bullying made them more confident and tougher.

How do you feel when you get bullied?

The answers to this question were very similar to the previous question. The feeling words and phrases that stood out the most included upset, depressed, cry, mad, embarrassed, little, weak, insignificant, angry, sad, sorry, taking something out of my heart, scared, anxious, bad, weird, guilty, wimpy, feel like punching someone, nervous, terrible, frustrated, unwanted, and lonely. Only two participants responded that their feelings were not hurt. One described standing up for himself. Another said that there was no need to worry because it was just the opinion of the bully, and not a factual statement.

What do you think the purpose of bullying is?

The participants shared a variety of reasons why someone might bully. The purpose that came up the most was that bullies were dealing with their own problems by taking it out on the victims. Another common response was that the bullies wanted to seem “cool” to others. Some said that they probably learned how to be that way from their parents. Others said that simply being mean was the purpose. Olweus (1993) shared some of the same reasons as the participants. He said that bullies have a strong need to dominate and overpower others, may have learned hostility from their home environment, and may benefit from their negative behavior (e.g., looking good amongst their peers and intimidating their victims to give them objects they desire such as money).

Both participants and Olweus (1993) mentioned that bullies probably learned their negative behavior from their parents. This idea relates to two theories. Swearer and Doll (2001)

explained that Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory states that people learn according to their social and physical environments. On the same note, Albert Bandura's (1973) social learning theory states that behavior is shaped by what one observes.

How do you react when you get bullied?

The participants shared a multitude of ways they reacted when being bullied. Some of the reactions included fighting, running away, getting angry, telling an adult, crying, ignoring it, and standing up for themselves. The reactions reported the most were getting angry and telling an adult. Standing up for oneself and ignoring it were also mentioned more than once. According to Piskin (2003) typical reactions include avoidance behaviors, aggressive behaviors, and poor academic performance.

How do you cope/deal with being bullied?

Some of the participants coped by exercising, playing videogames, and writing in a journal. However, the majority of the participants stated that they tell someone about the bullying. These people included the school counselor, a teacher, parents, an administrator, their siblings, and their friends. Others mentioned running away or ignoring it. Some of these answers were very similar to the ones answered for how one reacts to being bullied.

What do you think should happen to bullies?

The majority of participants felt that bullies should be punished/disciplined for their negative behavior. Methods of punishment included reporting it to law enforcement and subsequently pressing charges, sending the bully to BAC (Brownsville Academic Center)/boot camp, ISS (in school suspension), out of school suspension, taken to prisons where the "scared straight"/"tough love" approach is used, and Facebook account deleted. A couple of students even mentioned that bullies should "get their asses kicked."

On the contrary, many participants also suggested a less retributive approach. For example, one participant stated that bullies should be reprimanded for their behavior, but they should also be helped to learn how to stop that behavior. Several participants felt that the bullies must learn what is right and wrong. In turn, the bully could recognize his or her wrongdoing and hopefully be remorseful. A couple of participants placed culpability on the bullies' parents with the belief that there was neglect or abuse and this brought out the meanness from the bullies. One participant said that in cases like these, the bully should be forgiven. Other participants felt it was important for adults (e.g., collaboration between counselors and parents) to speak with the bullies about the severe consequences of their behavior and teach them the correct way to behave.

Character education (e.g., compassion and empathy) and social skills training (e.g., learning how to be assertive) is very important (Mishna, 2003; Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006), especially for students with disabilities, as Christensen et al. (2012) found that low social skills were the main predictor of adolescents with disabilities being bullied. This type of education should target all students, not just ones with disabilities, to make sure it hits home with potential bullies, bystanders, and victims. Frisén and Holmqvist (2010) agreed with this notion as well. In their study, most of the participants suggested serious talks with all students involved and teaching the victims coping strategies.

On the contrary, using punishment without administering character education and social skills training is unacceptable and will backfire. Research findings suggest that the zero-tolerance method is not effective (APA Task Force on Zero Tolerance, 2008; Casella, 2003). Strategies such as in school and out of school suspension, expulsion, as well as removal from the campus is ineffective because it still does not teach the bully the proper way to treat someone.

These methods actually teach students that the very institutions that are supposed to educate them actually reject them (Swearer, Limber, & Alley, 2009).

Where do you get bullied the most?

According to the participants, school is the primary setting where they get bullied. Olweus (1993) stated as well that most bullying occurs at school. In fact, bullying is the most reported type of school violence (Carney, 2009). Participants also stated specifically where the bullying occurs at school.

According to the participants' responses, it occurs the most in the hallways. They also said that it happens a lot in the classrooms. During lunch in the cafeteria can be rough as well. During physical education (p.e.) class and in the locker rooms participants have encountered bullying. Carney (2009) called the hallways, cafeteria, gym, and the restrooms "key zones," (p. 759) because these are often the places where bullying takes place since it is less structured than the classroom. Interestingly enough, none of the participants mentioned the restrooms; however, the classrooms were a place that bullying took place the most. On a related note, Espelage and Asidao (2001) found that their participants had similar answers. These middle school Midwestern students said bullying occurred the most in the hallways, cafeteria, locker rooms, restrooms, recess, in the classrooms, between periods, and outside the campus. The participants stated that bullying probably occurred the most in these places because there was a lack of adult supervision or at least proper supervision to intervene. Again, participants from the Espelage and Asidao (2001) study felt that bullying occurred mostly in places where no adult is watching or where nothing can be heard. The higher the number of staff supervising during break periods (lunch and hallways), the less chances for bullying to occur (Olweus, 1993). Other places

mentioned less included outside (e.g., courtyard) and even in the home (big brother bullies sibling).

When do you get bullied the most?

Some of the participants responded with the same answers from the previous question having to do with setting. For example, a couple of participants said they got bullied the most when they were in the hallways or in p.e. Other students stated they got bullied when they were in their classes during multiple periods. A few students said bullying was an everyday occurrence. Again, it was emphasized in this question as well that bullying happened the most when there was no security or adult supervision around.

How often do you worry about getting bullied?

Several participants answered the same way – “a lot.” One participant even scaled it by saying, “Eight or nine on a scale of 10.” Other words and phrases included “always,” “all the time,” and “daily basis.” However, there were also participants that stated that they never worried. One participant said telling an adult helped ease any anxiety.

Do you ever tell anyone, like an adult, when you get bullied? If so, who do you tell?

The majority of the participants answered affirmatively. Most told both their mother and father. Many also told their teachers (folder and BI teachers included). Counselors were told as well. Other adults told included the principal, security officer, and sergeants (for those at an alternative school). A couple said that they told their friends. These results were very similar to Carran and Kellner’s (2009) study on adolescents with emotional disturbance. The majority of these participants also reported bullying primarily to their parents, another adult at school, a teacher, a friend, a brother or sister, or someone else. However, Piskin (2003) explained that in Britain, one study’s results included a very low percentage of participants telling their parents.

On the contrary, participants in a Greek study told their parents much more than the British ones. The assumption is that culture could be a factor when determining whether or not participants disclose bullying to an adult.

Have any adults ever seen you bullied and, if so, what did they do?

The majority of participants stated that no adult has seen them get bullied. Some attributed this to too many students and not enough adult eyes to observe what was happening. When adults did see it, they intervened most of the time. Interventions included taking the bully aside and scolding or talking with them, and making a referral. One teacher made the principal aware of the situation. Another teacher called the security officer to intervene as well. One participant stated that a substitute did nothing after witnessing the bullying. Cooper and Snell (2003) stated that adults play a pivotal role in intervening and preventing bullying. They also emphasized that adults need proper training in recognizing bullying because many have misconceptions about it.

Summary

Chapter IV presented the findings of this study by detailing the responses to the 13 questions asked in the interview. The discussion was then presented to elaborate on the responses and find out whether or not this study's responses were similar or different to other similar studies. The answers to the research questions were also found within these participants' responses

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Chapter V presents several sections. It begins with the limitations of this study. The next section discusses the implications for rehabilitation counselors and other professionals. Recommendations for future research are also investigated. Chapter V then concludes with a final summary.

Limitations

There were several limitations for this study, some of which have already been mentioned. First, the use of open-ended questions provided the participants the ability to leave items out in their responses. A second limitation of this study, although appropriate for phenomenological research, is that only 25 middle school adolescents in the special education program provided data. All of the participants attended a middle school in Brownsville, Texas, and all, with the exception of one (Mexican), are Mexican American. Third, some of the participants' responses were brief. This could have been due to several factors including: age, shyness, cultural influence, or lack of ability to discuss topics in depth.

Implications for Rehabilitation Counselors and other Professionals

The implications that stem from this research evolved from the voices of the participants. Early character education and social skills training is key (Mishna, 2003). Several participants voiced that they believe bullies need to be educated on how to act properly. On the same note, it

is important for every child, especially potential victims, to learn how to be assertive rather than aggressive (Coloroso, 2008). These life skills will impact children as they transition into adolescence as well as the transition into adulthood. Unfortunately, bullying is not just a child or adolescent phenomenon. It can continue into adulthood, especially in the workforce.

In the case that it does occur, the adults need to be prepared to handle bullying effectively. Adults can be cruel as well and if they see someone who appears weak and vulnerable, with low self-esteem, this person might become a potential target. In the rehabilitation field, counselors need to be aware of this and plan accordingly. Hopefully the consumer has been taught how to be assertive and stand up for him or herself, but if not, it should be the counselors' job to educate them on these effective skills. It will make a whole lot of difference in the workforce.

Future Research

In this study, the researcher attempted to describe the bullying experiences of middle school students in the special education program. It was a first attempt at gaining a deeper understanding of how this specific population experiences bullying. The following potential areas of research are recommended.

Future research might explore other border cities along the Mexican border (e.g., McAllen, Laredo, and El Paso). Also, border cities along New Mexico, Arizona, and California can be researched as well. Researchers can look for differences and similarities between Brownsville's study and those of other border cities. Another related area of study could be to investigate and focus on one specific disability (for instance, adolescents with hearing impairments). This researcher chose to generalize the disabilities rather than specify since it was

the first study of its kind for the researcher. However, it would be interesting to read an in-depth study on one specific population.

Future studies could also include adults with disabilities who have been bullied in the workforce. Asking similar questions to this researcher's such as "How do you cope?" or "Who do you tell?" could lead to fascinating results. It would be interesting to read the similarities and differences between the responses from adolescents and adults. Another area of exploration might be to conduct a similar phenomenological study on different cultures, ethnicities, and religious groups here in America or beyond as well. For example, the majority of the participants in this researcher's study were Mexican Americans. Someone could take this further by exploring the Native American, Jewish, or Korean adolescent population and their experiences with bullying. There are a variety of cultures to choose from.

Finally, since character education and social skills training has been suggested by numerous sources as well as participants in bullying studies, a researcher could do a before and after analysis. For example, students classified as bullies, bystanders, or victims could answer questions before taking a social skills class for a determined amount of time. After the conclusion of the class, they could be interviewed again to see if their responses remain the same or have changed.

Summary

Bullying is a world-wide phenomenon (Piskin, 2002). Bullying is the most reported type of school violence (Carney, 2009). DoSomething.org stated that over 3.2 million students are bullied each year. This researcher hopes the results of this study will motivate all involved in the education field (everyone from custodians to administrators), parents, and policy makers to better recognize the importance of how bullying can shape students' lives. Students with disabilities,

as well as all students, have the right to learn in a safe environment. There is also a legal and ethical responsibility to prevent and intervene against bullying. Especially for students with disabilities, federal laws like Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) prohibit discrimination based on disability.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

BISD APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH STUDY

BROWNSVILLE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
Application for Research Study
(Please type)

Proposal Number: (Assigned by BISD)	
Date of Submission:	June 13, 2012
Proposed Project Starting Date:	September 2012
Proposed Project Ending Date:	April 2013
Proposed Preliminary Report Date:	tentative
Title of Proposed Project:	"A Phenomenological Study of Middle School Bullying in a South Texas City."
Ultimate Purpose of Study (Thesis, Publication in Journal):	dissertation

I. Director of Research Project (i.e., Applicant)

Name: Vanessa C. Cantu
Address: 955 E. San Marcelo Blvd., Brownsville, TX, 78526
Phone: (Home) 956.243.0162
(Work) 956.698.0589

II. Faculty or Staff Sponsor of Research Project

Name: Dr. Roy Chen
Address: 1201 W. University Dr., Edinburg, TX, 78539

Phone: (Work) 956.665.7036

III. Research Overview:

SAMPLE	Number	Description (Grades, Schools, Demographics)
Students	Approximately 20	See below
Staff/Others	N/A	
Parents	N/A	

PARTICIPATION	Time Required	Data Required (New & from School/Central Records)
Students	45 minutes	Age, sex, race, disability type, and IQ level
Staff/Others	N/A	
Parents	N/A	

COMMENTS (please attach additional pages if necessary): At this time I'd like to focus on interviewing students only. However, it might be pertinent throughout the course of the research to interview adults (parents, teachers, staff) as well.

V. Hypothesis of the study or research question(s):

Central question:

1. What meaning do special education middle school students ascribe to their experiences with bullying, and how do these students construct and understand their subjective experiences of being bullied?

Subquestions:

2. What themes are discovered from these students' experiences?
3. How do these students cope with bullying?
4. What interventions do these students suggest might be helpful in dealing with bullying?

V. Is this a single study or one of a series planned or contemplated?

Single study

VI. Brief summary of research design including data analysis procedures (if BISD databases are to be used, please be as detailed as possible about sampling needs, variables, and analyses required):

This is a qualitative study (phenomenological approach) that will include simple descriptive statistics like demographics (standard deviation, range, mean).

VII. Please utilize at least three of the most prominent research studies, articles, or books most pertinent to this field of research in answering the following questions (please attach additional pages if necessary): ([see attached reference list](#))

- How will this study contribute to the Brownsville Independent School District?
- How does this study relate to BISD's current research priorities (p. 8)?
- How will this study contribute to this field of research?

It will contribute to the knowledge base of school counseling by examining factors that contribute to bullying and the mindset of the student being bullied. Bullying is a world-wide phenomenon and has taken great notice in the past decade due to media reports of suicide and other violent acts (Coloroso, 2008). Bullying is the most common type of school violence reported (Carney, 2009). I have chosen to take a unique angle and focus on special education middle school students who have been bullied. Middle school is a transitional period and research dictates that bullying peaks during these formative years (Scaglione &

Scaglione, 2006). It has also been found in research that students with disabilities encounter more incidents of bullying than students without disabilities (Mishna, 2003; Raskauskas & Modell, 2011).

I would like to interview students who have experienced bullying in order to learn more about this topic. I believe that they will share a wealth of information, particularly more than we get from quantitative studies that use surveys and other questionnaires. Another factor is that we live in a border city with many Hispanic adolescents. There is a possibility that this cultural factor will contribute to additional knowledge as well. I believe that we can learn a great deal from these students' experiences and use what we learn to help our students succeed emotionally as well as academically.

VIII. Source of research funds:

No financial interest. I have received no external financial funds.

IX. List equipment and names of tests to be used (attach description or copies of test instruments.): digital tape recorder and script questions (see attached interview questions)

X. Does any of the equipment or procedures to be used constitute a potential emotional or physical hazard to subjects?

No Yes X (If yes, explain.) Some of the interview questions may elicit unpleasant memories.

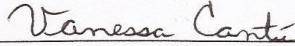
XI. Facilities needed: secluded room

XII. Research Assistants: UTPA graduate students to interview and transcribe tapes

XIII. Assurances:

I understand that I am requesting assistance in a research project and I am not requesting information pursuant to the Texas Open Records Act. If my request for research assistance is granted, I agree to abide by all policies, rules, and regulations of the district *including securing written parental permission prior to implementation of my project, and maintaining the confidential nature of records and the privacy and rights of the individual and school.*

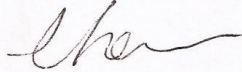
Signed:



Director of Research Project

I have read the Procedures for Research in the Brownsville Independent School District by Outside Agencies or Individuals and understand that supervision of this project and responsibility for a report on its outcome rests with me. I also understand that the privilege of conducting future studies in the Brownsville Independent School District is conditioned upon the fulfillment of such obligations.

Signed:



Sponsor of Research Project

BROWNSVILLE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
Access to Confidential Data
BISD Staff/Non-BISD Client Agreement
(Please sign and return with the Application for Research Study)

Director of Research Project: Vanessa C. Cantu

Title: A Phenomenological Study of Middle School Bullying in a South Texas City.

Address: 955 E. San Marcelo Blvd.

City/State/Zip: Brownsville/Texas/78526

Telephone: Work 956.698.0589 Home 956.243.0162

Fax _____ E-mail vccantu@broncs.utpa.edu

Justifications: Educational Research

I understand that any unauthorized disclosure of confidential information is illegal as provided in the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. 1232 *eg. seq.* and in the implementing federal regulations found in 34 CFR Part 99. FERPA is specifically incorporated into the Texas Public Information Act (formerly known as the Open Records Act). It is listed as an exception to records that are subject to disclosures to the public.

In addition, I understand that any data, datasets or output reports that I, or any authorized representative, may generate using my passwords are confidential and the data are to be protected. I will not distribute to any unauthorized person any data or reports that I have access to or may generate using confidential data. I understand that I am responsible for any computer transactions performed as a result of access authorized by use of my sign-on(s)/password(s).

I hereby agree that failure to abide by the requirements of this client agreement may lead to the immediate revocation of any contract (or research study) that I may be performing for BISD. I understand that any intentional, knowing, or negligent release of confidential student information to unauthorized persons may also subject me to a legal cause of action for violation of an individual's civil rights in addition to state or federal criminal penalties. I also understand that failure to observe these restrictions constitutes a "Breach of Computer Security," as defined in the Texas Penal Code, Chapter 33.02, B, and that such an offense constitutes a Class A misdemeanor.

Vanessa Cantu

Director of Research Project's Signature

6-13-12

Date

[Signature]

Faculty or Staff Sponsor of Research Project's Signature

6/13/12

Date

(Revised 7-23-01)

BROWNSVILLE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Procedures for Conducting Research

Principal Agreement to Participate Form

I have reviewed the Application for Research Project # 2012-03-2 entitled

"A Phenomenological Study of Middle School Bullying in a South Texas City,"

and agree that our school will participate, subject to the researcher's compliance with District policies.

Principal

School

(Interim)
Dr. Edward Ade
Pereira
Sen. Dora
XSP Roney
Dr. Manzano
Dr. V. Drip.
Dr. Gentry
Charles Stillman
Judge Filemon B. Vela

Raul A. Besteiro, Jr. Middle School
Joseph Franklin Cummings Middle School
Harry Lee Faulk Middle School
Dr. Juliet V. Garcia Middle School
Senator Eddie A. Lucio, Jr. Middle School
Edward Manzano, Jr. Middle School
Dr. Arnulfo L. Oliveira Middle School
Louise C. Perkins Middle School
Mattye Gentry Stell Middle School
Charles Stillman Middle School
Judge Filemon B. Vela Middle School

To be returned to: The Assessment, Research, and Evaluation Department

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

BISD APPROVAL LETTER



Brownsville Independent School District

1900 Price Road-Suite 307 Brownsville, Texas 78521-2417 (956) 548-8000 Fax: (956) 548-8019

Dr. Carl A. Montoya
Superintendent of Schools

June 19th, 2012

Vanessa C. Cantu
955 E. San Marcelo
Brownsville, Texas 78526

Re: Application for Research Study

Dear Ms. Cantu:

Please be advised that your application for Research Study has been approved. The research ID number assigned to your request is 2012-03-2.

Your request reflects that the campuses you selected to include in your study are Besteiro, Cummings, Faulk, Garcia, Lucio, Manzano, Oliveira, Perkins, Stell, Stillman and Vela Middle School.

We are respectfully requesting that you forward your research results and/or a copy of the publication, if any, to our office upon completion of the project.

Good luck with your endeavor and thank you for your interest in the Brownsville Independent School District and its students.

Should you have any questions or require further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at 554-2806.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "RV" or "R. Vasquez", is written over the typed name.

Raul Vasquez, Administrator
Assessment, Research & Evaluation

RV/il

xc: Dr. Carl A. Montoya, Supt. Of Schools
Sandra Lopez, Area Assist. Supt. for Hanna Cluster
Dr. Rita Hernandez, Area Assist. Supt. For Porter Cluster
Middle School Principals

"The Brownsville Independent School District is an Equal Opportunity Employer, M/W/D/V"

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

FORMAL LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

June 22, 2012

Dear Principal [insert name here],

I would like to ask permission to conduct my study entitled, “A Phenomenological Study of Middle School Bullying in a South Texas City,” at your campus. The purpose of this study is to fulfill my educational requirements at The University of Texas – Pan American. I’m currently a doctoral candidate in the rehabilitation counseling program and have chosen bullying as my dissertation topic.

Bullying is a world-wide phenomenon and has taken great notice in the past decade due to media reports of suicide and other violent acts. I have chosen to take a unique angle and focus on special education middle school students who have been bullied. Middle school is a transitional period and research dictates that bullying peaks during these formative years. It has also been found in research that students in the special education program face more incidents of bullying than students in the general population.

With your permission, I would like to interview students who have experienced bullying in order to learn more about this topic. I believe that they will share a wealth of information, particularly more than we get from quantitative studies that use surveys and other questionnaires.

Another factor is that we live in a border city with many Hispanic adolescents. There is a possibility that this cultural factor will contribute to additional knowledge as well.

I believe that we can learn a great deal from these students' experiences and use what we learn to help our students succeed emotionally as well as academically. I would really appreciate your support. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Vanessa C. Cantú

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D

PARENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(ENGLISH and SPANISH)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A Phenomenological Study of Middle School Bullying in the Rio Grande Valley

Investigator: Vanessa C. Cantu, M.Ed.

Background: I am conducting a research study about bullying against middle school students in the special education program. The purpose of this study is to find out which interventions are best to prevent bullying. This study is being conducted as partial fulfillment of a doctoral degree in rehabilitation counseling from The University of Texas-Pan American under the supervision of Dr. Roy Chen.

Procedure: I will ask your child to participate in a one-time interview that will last approximately 45 minutes long. Your child will be asked questions such as is if he or she has been bullied because of his or her disability, and if so, what interventions are suggested to deal with bullying. Your child may refuse to answer any question that they do not want to answer or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Your child's name will remain anonymous in any documents related to this study. Since the interview will be transcribed, your child's interview will be audio taped. Your child will be asked to sign a separate permission form in order to permit me to audio tape his or her interview.

Risks or Possible Discomforts Associated with the Study: Because the nature of the study involves a sensitive subject, the child may experience some discomfort with the questions.

Benefits of Participation: Bullying is an important topic and through talking with your child, I hope to learn something new that will benefit society. This information has the potential to help other students who have experienced bullying and to educate adults about intervention methods

that might help those students. Voluntary Participation: Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. He or she may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If for any reason he or she decides to discontinue participation, I will stop the questioning.

Anonymity and/or Confidentiality: All names will remain confidential. I will maintain this by securing any data (demographics, disability type, etc.) under lock and key. Audio tapes will be destroyed after transcription has taken place. Transcripts and other indentifying information will be stored in a secure manner for five years. Your child's responses may be quoted in whole or in part in publications or presentations about this research. If quotes are used, his or her real name will be replaced by a made up name (pseudonym) and any additional information that might directly identify him or her will be removed.

Who to Contact for Research Related Questions: For questions about research itself, or to report any adverse effects during or following participation, contact the researcher, [Vanessa C. Cantu] at [956.243.0162, vccantu@broncs.utpa.edu, 1201 W. University Dr., Edinburg, TX, 78539]. You may also contact my supervisor, [Dr. Roy Chen] at [956.665.7036, rchen@utpa.edu, 1201 W. University Dr., Edinburg, TX, 78539].

Who to Contact Regarding Your Rights as a Participant: This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at 956.665.2889 or irb@utpa.edu. You are also invited to provide anonymous feedback to the IRB by visiting www.utpa.edu/IRBfeedback.

Signatures: By signing below, you indicate that you are voluntarily agreeing to allow your child to participate in this study and that the procedures involved have been described to your satisfaction. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your own reference.

Parent/legal guardian signature

____/____/____
Date

* Your child may refuse to participate even if you, the parent/legal guardian, agrees to let your child participate

FORMA DE CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

Un Estudio Fenomenológico de Intimidación de Escuela Secundaria en el Valle del Río Grande

Investigadora: Vanessa C. Cantu, M.Ed.

Información: Yo estoy dirigiendo un estudio de investigación sobre la intimidación contra estudiantes de escuela secundaria en el programa de educación especial. El propósito de este estudio es averiguar qué intervenciones son mejores para evitar el acoso. Este estudio se está llevando a cabo en cumplimiento parcial de un doctorado en rehabilitación orientación psicológica por parte de la Universidad de Texas - Pan American bajo la supervisión del Doctor Chen.

Procedimiento: Le voy a pedir a su niño que participe en una entrevista que durará aproximadamente 45 minutos. A su hijo se le harán preguntas tales como si él o ella ha sido objeto de acoso debido a su discapacidad, y si es así ¿qué intervenciones son sugeridos para acabar con el acoso? Su hijo puede negarse a contestar las preguntas que no desea contestar o retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento sin ningún tipo de penalización. El nombre de su niño permanecerá anónimo en cualquier documento relacionado con este estudio. Ya que la entrevista será transcrita, la entrevista de su niño será audio grabado. A su niño se le pedirá que firme un formulario de permiso por separado para permitir el audio grabación de su entrevista.

Riesgos o Incomodidades Posibles Asociadas con el estudio: Debido a la naturaleza del estudio implica a un tema delicado, el niño puede experimentar algunas molestias con las preguntas.

Beneficios de la Participación: La intimidación es un tema importante y a través de la conversación con su niño, yo espero aprender algo nuevo que beneficiará la sociedad. Esta información tiene el potencial para ayudar a otros estudiantes que han experimentado la intimidación y educar a adultos sobre métodos de intervención que podrían ayudar a los estudiantes.

Participación voluntaria: La participación de su niño en este estudio es voluntaria. Él o ella pueden poner fin a cualquier momento sin ningún tipo de penalización. Si por cualquier motivo él o ella deciden discontinuar la participación, pararé el cuestionario.

Anonimato y Confidencialidad: Todos los nombres se mantendrán confidenciales. Mantendré todos los datos (demografía, tipo de discapacidad etc.) bajo llave. Las cintas de audio serán destruidas después de que la transcripción ha ocurrido. Las transcripciones y otra información de identificación se almacenan de forma segura durante cinco años. Las respuestas de su hijo puede ser citado en su totalidad o en parte en publicaciones o presentaciones acerca de esta investigación. Si se utilizan las cotización, su verdadero nombre será sustituido por un

seudónimo y cualquier información adicional que puede directamente identificar él o ella será eliminado.

Quién es la persona de contacto para cuestiones relacionadas con la investigación: Para preguntas acerca de la investigación o para informar de cualquier efecto adverso durante o después de la participación, se puede poner en contacto con la investigador, [Vanessa C. Cantu] a [956.243.0162, vccantu@broncs.utpa.edu, 1201 W. University Dr., Edinburg, TX 78539].

También puede comunicarse con mi supervisor, [Dr. Roy Chen] al [956.665.7036, rchen@utpa.edu , 1201 W. University Dr., Edinburg, TX 78539]

A quien contactar con respecto a sus derechos como participante: Esta investigación ha sido revisada y aprobada por el Comité Examinador Institucional para la Protección de Seres humanos. Si usted tiene cualquier pregunta sobre sus derechos como un participante, o si usted siente que sus derechos como un participante no suficientemente fueron encontrados (cumplidos) por la investigación, por favor póngase en contacto con el (IRB) al 956.665.2889 o irb@utpa.edu. Usted también es invitado a proporcionar comentarios anónimos al (IRB) al visitar www.utpa.edu/IRBfeedback .

Firmas: Al firmar, usted indica que está aceptando voluntariamente para permitir que su hijo participe en este estudio y que los procedimientos implicados han sido descritos a su satisfacción. El investigador le proporcionará una copia de este formulario para su propia referencia.

Padre/Gaurdian legal

____/____/____
Fecha

*Su hijo puede negarse a participar incluso si usted, el padre/guardián legal, está de acuerdo para dejar a su hijo participar.

APPENDIX E

APPENDIX E

STUDENT ASSENT FORM

(ENGLISH AND SPANISH)

ASSENT FORM

A Phenomenological Study of Middle School Bullying in the Rio Grande Valley

I am doing a research study about bullying. A research study is a way to learn more about something. I would like to find out more about bullying and how it can be prevented. You are being asked to join the study because you are a middle school student currently in the special education program.

If you agree to join this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-time audio taped interview that should last about 45 minutes. Your responses may be quoted in whole or in part in publications or presentations about this research. If quotes are used, your real name will be replaced by a made up name (pseudonym) and any additional information that might directly identify you will be removed.

At times you might feel uncomfortable with some of the questions because they may bring up upsetting memories. I do not know if this study will help you, but it might help other teenagers some day.

This study will help me learn about interventions that could help other teenagers, like you, experiencing bullying.

You do not have to join this study. It is up to you. You can also agree now and change your mind later. All you have to do is tell me and I will stop. No one will be mad at you if you don't want to be in the study or if you join the study and change your mind later and stop.

Before you say yes or no to being in this study, I or my supervisor can answer any questions you have. If you join the study, you can ask questions at any time. Just tell the researcher that you have a question.

If you have any questions about this study please feel free to contact the researcher, [Vanessa C. Cantu] at [956.243.0162, vccantu@broncs.utpa.edu, 1201 W. University Drive, Edinburg, TX, 78539]. You may also contact my supervisor, [Dr. Roy Chen] at [956.665.7036, rchen@utpa.edu, 1201 W. University Drive, Edinburg, TX, 78539].

By signing below, you are letting me know that you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study and that you are okay with being interviewed about bullying. I will provide you with a copy of this form.

Signature

Date

FORMA DE ASENTIMIENTO

Un Estudio Fenomenológico de Intimidación de Escuela Secundaria en el Valle del Río Grande

Estoy haciendo un estudio de investigación sobre el intimidación escolar. Un estudio de investigación es una manera de aprender más acerca de algo. Me gustaría saber más sobre el intimidación escolar y cómo se puede prevenir. Se le ha pedido a participar en el estudio porque usted es un estudiante de educación media actualmente en el programa de educación especial.

Si usted acepta participar en este estudio, se le pedirá a participar en una sola entrevista con cinta audio que debe durar por lo menos 45 minutos. Sus respuestas pueden ser citadas en su totalidad o en parte en publicaciones o presentaciones sobre esta investigación. Si se usan comillas, su nombre real será sustituido por un nombre compuesto (seudónimo) y se eliminará cualquier información adicional que podría identificarlo directamente.

A veces usted podría sentirse incómodo con algunas de las preguntas porque se puede traer inquietantes recuerdos. No sé si este estudio ayudará a usted, pero puede ayudar a otras adolescentes algún día.

Usted no tiene que afiliarse a este estudio. Depende de usted. Usted también puede estar de acuerdo ahora y cambiar de opinión más tarde. Todo lo que usted tiene que hacer es decir me y pararé. Nadie estará enojara con usted si no desea estar en el estudio o si se une al estudio y decide cambiar de opinión o decide parar el estudio.

Antes de decir sí o no para estar en el estudio, yo o mi supervisor puedo contestar cualquier duda que tenga. Si se une al estudio, usted puede hacer preguntas en cualquier momento. Sólo diga le al investigador que usted tiene preguntas.

Si tiene alguna pregunta acerca de este estudio no dude en ponerse en contacto con el investigador, [Vanessa C. Cantu] numero de teléfono [956.243.0162, vccantu@broncs.utpa.edu , 1201 W. University Drive, Edinburg, TX 78539]. También puede comunicarse con mi supervisor, [Dr. Roy Chen] numero de teléfono [956.665.7036], rchen@utpa.edu, 1201 W. University Drive, Edinburg, TX 78539].

Al firmar, usted afirma que acepta voluntariamente a participar en este estudio y que está de acuerdo con estar entrevistado sobre la intimidación. Yo le proporcionará una copia de este formulario.

Firma

____/____/____

Fecha

APPENDIX F

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe bullying?
2. What is your experience with bullying?
3. What effect has it had on your life?
4. How do you feel when you get bullied?
5. What do you think the purpose of bullying is?
6. How do you react when you get bullied?
7. How do you cope/deal with being bullied?
8. What do you think should happen to bullies?
9. Where do you get bullied the most?
10. When do you get bullied the most?
11. How often do you worry about getting bullied?
12. Do you ever tell anyone, like an adult, when you get bullied? If so, who do you tell?
13. Have any adults ever seen you bullied and, if so, what did they do?

APPENDIX G

APPENDIX G

IRB NEW STUDY APPLICATION

New Study Application Form

Instructions: Incomplete forms will delay the IRB review process and may be returned to you. Type your information in the **colored boxes** and insert an **“X”** in the applicable checkboxes.

SECTION A: Title

A1. Study Title: “A Phenomenological Study of Middle School Bullying in the Rio Grande Valley.”

SECTION B: Investigators & Study Personnel

B1. Principal Investigator (P.I.):

Name:	Vanessa C. Cantu	Degree(s):	M.Ed.
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Title/Position:	Doctoral candidate	Department:	Rehabilitation counseling
Telephone:	956.243.0162	Email:	vccantu@broncs.utpa.edu
Campus Address	1201 W. University Drive, Edinburg, TX 78539		

* Check here if the PI is a graduate or undergraduate student: ☒ Graduate ☐ Undergraduate

B2. Faculty Advisor (if applicable):

Name:	Dr. Roy Chen	Degree(s):	Ph.D.
Telephone:	956.665.7036	Email:	rchen@utpa.edu
Campus Address	1201 W. University Drive, Edinburg, TX 78539		

B3. Additional Research Personnel and roles (e.g., Co-PI, Research Assistant, etc) (if applicable):

Name:		Study Role:	
Title/Position:		Email:	

Name:		Study Role:	
Title/Position:		Email:	

Name:		Study Role:	
Title/Position:		Email:	

Name:		Study Role:	
Title/Position:		Email:	

Name:		Study Role:	
Title/Position:		Email:	

SECTION C: Review Type Requested

C1. Does the study involve greater than “minimal risk”? (*Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests*).

More than minimal risk will require Full Board Review. Place an “X” next to the appropriate response.

☒ Low/Minimal Risk

☐ Greater Than Minimal Risk

C2. Will the study involve deception or incomplete disclosure to human subjects?

☐ Yes ☒ No

C3. Which level of review do you believe best matches your research (Exempt, Expedited, or Full)? If Exempt or Expedited is selected, indicate which category matches your research (multiple categories may be listed). For more information, view the list of [exempt](#) and [expedited](#) categories. The most common exempt categories used are #1, #2, and #4. The most common expedited category used is #7.

☐ a. **Exempt** (submit 1 original + 1 copy)

Category #	
------------	--

☒ b. **Expedited** (submit 1 original + 1 copy)

Category #	
------------	--

☐ c. **Full Board Review** (research that is greater than minimal risk and/or does not fall within one of the exempt or expedited categories). (submit 1 original + 10 copies)

SECTION D: Study Funding

Section Notes...

- If study is dependent on grant funding, please submit the protocol *after* you have received a fundable score or notice of grant award *unless* the granting agency requires IRB review (or approval) at the time of submission. Check with your funding agency on their requirements.

D1. If you are applying for research funding for this study, please indicate the source of the funding and the current status of your funding/grant application:

--

SECTION E: Project Purpose/ Research Question/ Objectives

In non-technical language, address the following:

- 1) Area of the research
- 2) Describe the purpose/objective
- 3) Significance of the research is
- 4) Any relevant literature pertaining to the proposed research study

1) Bullying against middle school students in the special education program

2) The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to describe, from the special education middle school students' perspective, the negative effects that bullying has on them and to also suggest interventions that might be helpful.

3) Bullying is an occurring problem worldwide.

4) Research from Dan Olweus, considered the pioneer of bullying research, is relevant.

SECTION F: Subject Population and Recruitment

(Recruitment materials (e.g. flyers or e-mail recruitment text) should be included in the appendix.)

F1. In non-technical language, address the following:

- 1) Who the subjects will be (including age range) and the planned number of subjects
- 2) Inclusion/exclusion criteria (if applicable)
- 3) From where subjects will be recruited
- 4) Recruitment methods
- 5) Which members of the research team will be directly involved in the recruitment process

1) 20 middle school students (ages 11-15)

2) only students in the special education program

3)BISD middle schools

4)counselors and special education teachers will distribute a consent form to the students

5)Principal Investigator

F2. This study will involve the following subjects (place an “X” next to all that apply)...

☐ a. Not Applicable (e.g., de-identified datasets)

OR

☐ Individuals who cannot read/speak English

☐ Individuals living outside of the U.S.

☒ Students of PI or study staff

☒ Students to be recruited in their educational setting, i.e. in class or at school.

☐ UTPA Staff or Faculty

☒ Minors/Children

☐ Prisoners

☐ Diagnosable Psychological Disorder

☐ Institutionalized

☒ Poor/uninsured

- ☐ Pregnant women
- ☐ Fetuses
- ☐ Nursing home residents recruited in the nursing home
- ☐ Cognitively impaired
- ☒ Psychiatrically impaired
- ☐ Limited or non-readers
- ☐ Wards of the state (e.g., foster children)
- ☐ Terminally ill
- ☐ Others vulnerable to coercion (Specify in the box below):

- ☐ Other (Specify in the box below):

SECTION G: Data Collection and Design

In non-technical language, address the following:

- 1) State the **study activities in chronological order**. Describe both the activities conducted by members of the research team and the activities of research participants. (E.g., screening, survey, taking a test, answering questions in an interview, completing a specific task, tasks on a computer, running on a treadmill, debriefing, etc.). If videotaping, photographs, or audiotaping will take place, explain for what and why.
- 2) Which members of the research team will be involved in the research sessions (i.e. collecting data from participants)?

3) Explain how the **data will be analyzed or studied (i.e. quantitatively or qualitatively) and how the **data will be reported** (i.e. aggregated, anonymously, pseudonyms for participants, etc.).**

1)The students will answer questions through a 45-minute interview. Audiotaping will take place in order to transcribe the interview.

2)Both research assistants will be involved in the research sessions.

3)This will be a qualitative study and names will remain anonymous. Pseudonyms will be used for the participants for any quoted material.

SECTION H: Study Involvement

H1. This study involves (place an “X” next to all that apply)...

☐ Existing datasets

☒ Interviews/Focus Groups

☐ Questionnaires/Surveys

☐ Observations

☐ Videotaping

☒ Audiotaping

☐ Photography

- ☒ Questions that might result in identifying criminal activities
- ☐ Questions that might result in identifying child or elder abuse
- ☐ Internet research
- ☒ Review of academic records
- ☒ Review of medical records
- ☒ Exposure to psychological stress
- ☐ Use of physiological sensors (e.g. heart rate, skin conductance, BP)
- ☐ Physical exercise
- ☐ Collection of blood or biological specimens
- ☐ Genetic Material
- ☐ Diagnostic imaging (e.g., MRI, fMRI, X-Rays, etc.)
- ☐ Surgery
- ☐ Electrical shock
- ☐ Chemical or biological agent (clinical)
- ☐ FDA for “off label” use
- ☐ Investigational New Device (clinical)
- ☐ Investigational Drug Exemption (clinical)
- ☐ Other invasive procedure (Specify in the box below):

SECTION I: Deception/ Incomplete Disclosure (INSERT “NA” IF NOT APPLICABLE)

If you cannot adequately state the true purpose of the study to the subject in the informed consent, deception/ incomplete disclosure is involved.

- 1) Describe the deception/ incomplete disclosure of information to the subjects.
- 2) Explain why such deception/ incomplete disclosure is necessary.
- 3) Explain the debriefing process, or explain why there will not be a debriefing process.

1)N/A

2)N/A

3)N/A

SECTION J: Consent/Assent

Describe the following:

- 1) How will **consent/assent** be obtained place. E.g., in person, online web survey, etc.
- 2) Which members of the research team will be responsible for obtaining subject consent?
- 3) If applicable, what procedures are in place to reduce coercion (e.g., if extra credit is offered, what non-research alternatives are available to students who do not wish to participate in research).
- 4) If participants do not speak English as a first language or might have trouble comprehending the consent, describe the process for obtaining consent (e.g., translated consent, verbal consent, etc.).
- 5) Is a request for a [waiver of consent](#) or [waiver of documentation of consent](#) being sought for this proposal? If yes, indicate the nature of the waiver and provide justification, including how the study meets 45CFR46-listed criteria for a waiver.

1)in person

2)Principal Investigator

3)N/A

4)translated consent/assent

5) No

SECTION K: Risks to Subjects

(IRBs must evaluate the risk-benefit ratio of proposed human subjects research. In approving a protocol, IRBs must determine that the benefits outweigh the risks and that risks to subjects are minimized)

Research risk is the probability of harm occurring as a result of participation in research. In non-technical language, address the following:

- 1) The types of risks (e.g., physical, psychological, social, economic, legal, etc.) the subject may *reasonably* encounter.
- 2) Estimate the **frequency/likelihood** and **magnitude** of those risks (cite relevant literature, if available).
- 3) Describe the **procedures/process** which will be used to **reduce or minimize risks**:
 - a. How the data will be safeguarded (e.g., data is anonymous, assigning pseudonyms, coded, etc.).

- 1) low minimal risk of psychological harm due the nature of the subject being studied
- 2) low minimal risk
- 3) All names will remain anonymous. Pseudonyms will be provided with any quoted material. Data will be under lock and key and the only people who will have access to this material will be the principal investigator, the faculty advisor, and the research assistants. All audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription has taken place. If the student gets upset at any time, the study will stop.

Describe any direct benefits participants could potentially receive (excluding compensation for participation). If there are no direct benefits, explain what other potential benefits are gained from the research (benefits to society).

I will be able to learn new information such as interventions that could potentially help other students.

SECTION M: Subject Incentives/ Compensations

M1. Does this study involve incentives or compensation to the subjects? For example cash, class extra credit, gift cards, or items.

☐ Yes ☒ No

M1a. If “Yes”, provide details about the nature of the payment (type, amount, when it will be provided to subjects, contingencies for payment, payment schedule, etc):

M1b. If “Yes”, what records will be retained regarding payment and who will these records be provided to (e.g. signed payment receipt, names and social security numbers provided to accounts payable for check payments, etc):

SECTION N: Collaborative Research

N1. Does this study involve collaboration with a researcher who is not affiliated with UTPA?

☐ Yes ☒ No

N1.b. If yes, describe the role of the collaborating researcher in the proposed study and indicate whether or not IRB approval has been sought/obtained from his/her institution.

SECTION 0: Conflicts of Interest

Do any of the study personnel have a conflict of interest related to this study (e.g. potential financial gain linked to the research and/or subject recruitment)?

☐ Yes ☒ No

H1a. If “Yes”, provide details below

SECTION P: Additional Information

M1. Use this area to add any additional information that you believe is relevant to the IRB’s review of your study.

SECTION Q: Human Subjects (CITI) Training

H1. Indicate whether any of the following topics apply to your proposed study

(Note that the corresponding “optional” CITI modules must be completed in addition to the Basic CITI course)

☒ Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBR

☒ Research with Children - SBR

☐ Internet Research - SBR

☐ International Research - SBR

☒ HIPAA and Human Subjects Research

☐ Research with Prisoners - SBR

☐ Workers as Research Subjects-A Vulnerable Population

☐ Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Pregnant Women and Fetuses in Utero

☐ Group Harms: Research With Culturally or Medically Vulnerable Groups

☐ FDA-Regulated Research

☐ Genetic Research in Human Populations

SECTION R: Investigator Assurances

As a PI or Co-PI, I certify the following:

- I have reviewed this protocol submission and acknowledge my responsibilities as Principal Investigator.
- The information in this submission accurately reflects the proposed research.
- I will not initiate this study until I receive written approval from the IRB.
- I will promptly report to the IRB any unanticipated problems and adverse events, as well as any findings during the course of the study that may affect the risks and benefits to the subjects.
- I will obtain prior written approval for modifications (amendments) to this protocol including, but not limited to, changes in procedures and/or changes in personnel.
- I have completed the Human Subjects Training Module and have read the Belmont Report.
- All research personnel involved in the study have been appropriately trained in human subjects protection, or will be trained before involvement with “*human subjects*”.
- I accept responsibility for assuring adherence to applicable Federal and State research regulations and UTPA policies relative to the protection of the rights and welfare of the subjects enrolled in this study.
- I have obtained, or will obtain, all necessary permissions from study sites.

- I understand that the UTPA IRB operates under a Federal Wide Assurance (FWA) from the Department of Health and Human Services.
- Unless given Exempt Status, I understand that this study is subject to continuing review and approval by the IRB which will occur at least yearly.

Vanessa C. Cantu

Principal Investigator (PRINT NAME)

(SIGNATURE)

DATE

Co-PI (PRINT NAME)

(SIGNATURE)

DATE

Co-PI (PRINT NAME)

(SIGNATURE)

DATE

SECTION S: Faculty Advisor Assurances

As Faculty Advisor, I certify the following:

- I have reviewed this protocol submission and accept responsibility for overseeing my advisee's research for adherence to human subjects protection policies and procedures.
- The information in this submission accurately reflects the proposed research.
- I have completed the Human Subjects Training Module and have read the Belmont Report.

Dr. Roy Chen

Faculty Advisor (PRINT NAME)

(SIGNATURE)

DATE

SECTION P: Checklist

Please indicate which of the following you are including with your new protocol submission

Materials should be submitted to the Office of Research Administration, (REIN) Research & Innovation Building (formerly known as the old computer building) 1.106

For further assistance call 956-665.2889, or email at irb@utpa.edu

Note:

For Exempt & Expedited reviews, submit 1 original + 1 copy of IRB protocol and supporting documents

For Full reviews, submit 1 original + 10 copies of IRB protocol and supporting documents

☐ Recruitment materials (text, flyer, etc)

☐ Copies of scales/questionnaires/surveys

☒ List of interview questions

☒ English consent form(s)

☒ English assent form(s) or script(s)

☒ Translated consent/assent form(s)

☒ Printout of CITI completion report (Basic Course)

☒ Printout of CITI report (Optional Modules)

☒ Permission letter(s) from school districts, businesses, health centers, etc.

☐ IRB approval letter from collaborating investigator

☐ Copy of grant submission

☐ Debriefing script

☐ Confidentiality agreement from professional transcriber

☐ NIH Certificate of Confidentiality (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/coc/>)

☐
Other:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author, Vanessa Cristina Cantú, was born on October 20, 1978, in Brownsville, Texas. She currently lives in San Antonio, Texas, and works as a middle school counselor for the North East Independent School District.

She graduated from The University of Texas at Austin with a bachelor degree of journalism in 2001. She then received her Master of Education in counseling and guidance from The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College in 2006. Her latest academic pursuit was her doctorate in rehabilitation counseling from The University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg, Texas, received in 2015.

She worked nine years for the Brownsville Independent School District before moving to San Antonio. The first three years she served as an elementary teacher, and her last three as a middle school counselor. She is also a licensed professional counselor.

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