RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

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The present study is an examination of bullying perceptions by rural middle school students. Three rural middle schools participated in the study which involved 138 students completing The School Bullying Survey to determine their experiences with bullying by types and the overall school climate as it relates to bullying behavior.

Results from the responses on The School Bullying Survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics, multivariate analysis (MANOVA), univariate analysis (ANOVA), and post-hoc follow-up analysis. Significance was found when comparing gender and grade with dependent variable of physical bullying.

The practical implications of the current study include improved assessment of bullying behavior in schools, increased awareness of bullying behavior and victimization, greater knowledge of bullying in rural school environments, consequences of bullying as in a long-term context, and better intervention strategies to combat bullying and bullies in schools.

VITA

Jonte' Charez Taylor, son of Bonnie Kay Murphy, was born on April 24th, 1977 in Cleveland, Ohio. He graduated from Wilkinson County High School, Woodville, Mississippi in 1995. He earned his Bachelor of Science Degree in Mental Retardation Education from Tuskegee University in 2007 and a Masters in Collaborative Special Education from Auburn University in 2007. He worked in a residential facility for adults with mental retardation. He also worked as lead teacher for students with behavioral issues in a detention facility in Opelika, Alabama before pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Collaborative Special Education with a focus in autism and behavior disorders at Auburn University.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a growing field of study. The increase in focus on bullying can be partially attributed to the public instances of school violence, particularly the incidents that involve school shootings (Coloroso, 2003). Bullying and how much it occurs in school has become a central element as it relates to incidents of school violence that have occurred in recent years. Quantifying the extent of bullying has been attempted by a number of researchers (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001; Olweus, 1993; Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagle, & Mickelson, 2001). While it is virtually impossible to gain an exact measure of how much bullying goes on in schools, there has been a number of reports from a variety of sources (Coloroso, 2003; Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Olweus, 1978; Rigby, 1996) in which researchers have attempted to determine the extent to which bullying takes place. The purpose of the present study is to determine the significance of various types of bullying as perceived by middle school students.

Statement of the Problem

Recently, bullying has been regarded as a major area of concern for children while in school (Garrett, 2003). Further implicating bullying as a problem has been the relationship between school violence, particularly school shootings, and bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Garrett, 2003). Assessing the level of bullying in school and

developing interventions to reduce or prevent bullying have produced a number of products and practices to assist schools in combating the problems associated with a bully/victim climate that may exist.

There have not been many comprehensive studies of bullying and victimization in American schools; however, studies have shown that school violence is decreasing (McCabe & Martin, 2005). Unfortunately, the statistical decrease of school violence does not lend itself to a decrease in the practice of bullying and victimization. Assessing the extent of bullying is compounded by the close association that bullying has as with school violence. Many of the measures that are designed to quantify that amount of bullying in the educational setting have included questions concerning violence and crime.

Studies have revealed rates ranging from a low of 10 percent (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001) to a high of 75 percent (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988) of children who have reported being victims of bullies. Most studies indicate that approximately 15 percent to 20 percent of students will experience bullying at some point from kindergarten through high school graduation. In 2001, a nationally representative survey from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that 3.2 million students in grades 6 through 10 reported that they were victims of bullying (Nansel, et al., 2001). Nansel et al. (2001) also found that 3.7 million students reported that they bullied others. Students were considered moderate to frequent bullies if they participated in bullying “sometimes” to “several times a week.” Of these students, 1.2 million reported that they were both victims of bullies as well as bullies themselves.

Ultimately, 30 percent of young people across the nation were involved in moderate to frequent bullying, either as perpetrators, victims, or both.

Recently, the National Center for Education Statistics reported findings from the School Crime Supplement of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The NCVS revealed that in 2005:

- 28 percent of students ages 12–18 reported having been bullied at school during the previous 6 months.
- Of these students, 53 percent said that the bullying had happened once or twice during that period.
- 25 percent had experienced bullying once or twice a month.
- 11 percent reported having been bullied once or twice a week.
- 8 percent said they had been bullied almost daily.
- Of those students who reported bullying incidents that involved being pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on (9 percent), 24 percent reported that they had sustained an injury during the previous 6 months as a result.
- Among students who reported being bullied, males were more likely than females to report being injured during such an incident (31 vs. 18 percent).

There are several seminal studies that have provided the crux for the field of study (Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Heinemann, 1972; Olweus, 1978, 1993; Rigby, 2002; Tatum & Tatum, 1992). As it pertains to bullying, research has been sporadic and lacks any sense of uniformity in terms of assessment methodology. Considering the fluidness of social, cultural, and technological aspects of society and the relatively newness of research in the area of bullying, continued study is essential.

Definition of Terms

Each term below has been defined for the purpose of the present study.

Bully – An individual who intentionally cause embarrassment, pain, or discomfort to others (Orpinas and Horne, 2006).

Bullying – any repeated, intentional act by a more powerful person, which causes embarrassment, pain, or discomfort to victims (Williams, 2007).

Bystanders – part of the peer group of bullies and victims who may or may not intervene during episodes of bullying (Hazler, 1996).

Cyberbullying – use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others (Belsey, 2004).

Direct Bullying – interactions between bullies and victims that are open attacks (Olweus, 1993).

Indirect Bullying – isolation and intentional social exclusion (O'Moore & Minton, 2004).

Physical Bullying – any physical interaction between the bully and the victim (Crick, 1996).

Relational Bullying – emotional or psychological bullying, also considered exclusionary or social bullying. May include the behaviors of ignoring, isolating, excluding, shunning, and making others feel unwelcome (JAMA, 2001).

Sexual Bullying – behavior that is based on a person's sexuality or gender characteristics (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 2001).

Verbal Bullying – any name-calling, threats, teasing, spreading rumors, racial slurs, cruel criticism, and/or blackmailing other students (JAMA, 2001).

Victim – individuals who feel embarrassment, pain, or discomfort from imbalances in social status, special need, or sexual identity (Orpinas & Horne, 2006).

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study were as follows.

1. Is there a significant difference by gender when comparing perceptions of bullying by type (Social/Relational, Sexual, Cyber, Physical, and Verbal)?
2. Is there a significant difference by race/ethnicity when comparing perceptions of bullying by type (Social/Relational, Sexual, Cyber, Physical, and Verbal)?
3. Is there a significant difference by grade when comparing perceptions of bullying by type (Social/Relational, Sexual, Cyber, Physical, and Verbal)?

The research hypotheses are as follows:

HØ1 – There is no significant difference by gender when comparing perceptions of bullying by type (Social/Relational, Sexual, Cyber, Physical, and Verbal).

HØ2 – There is no significant difference by race/ethnicity when comparing perceptions of bullying by type (Social/Relational, Sexual, Cyber, Physical, and Verbal).

HØ3 – There is no significant difference by grade when comparing perceptions of bullying by type (Social/Relational, Sexual, Cyber, Physical, and Verbal).

Significance of the Study

Conducting a study of this kind provides various types of information regarding the significance of bullying and victimization for middle school children. This study in particular provides valuable information for a number of groups. Researchers, school districts, school officials, parents, and students could all benefit from the study. The schools, school officials, and school districts that participated in the study could find the results enlightening; regarding the extent to which their students feel bullying is a problem.

Researchers interested in studying bullying should find the study beneficial for later studies that the results could provide a framework on how to include multiple definitions and constructs in assessment (Coloroso, 2003; Rigby, 1996). The schools that participate in the study will get firsthand knowledge of the significance of bullying as a problem for students through a number of filters (age, grade, gender, race, and bullying type: physical, verbal, relational/social, sexual, and cyber). Schools with similar student demographics and characteristics could possibly use the current study results as a barometer to determine the level of concern that should be shown regarding bullying. Parents could use the results to evaluate the level of concern they should have for their children and the prospect of being a bully or the victim of bullying. Lastly, the students, especially the ones who feel they are victims of bullying, will be able to witness the school begin to take the issue of bullying seriously.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the present study involves the use of self-report surveys as the means of assessing bullying. Self-report surveys have shown to lack evidence regarding their empirical validity and reliability (Griffin & Gross 2004). Truthfulness is an issue with bullying self-report assessments, particularly with students admitting to being the perpetrators of bullying behavior. The survey used for the current study, while having questions designed for students to admit to being bullies, is more designed for students who are victims of bullying.

A second limitation to the study is scope. The vast number of bullying constructs makes it difficult to identify assessment tools that can concisely and accurately quantify bullying significance. The current study attempts to address multiple bullying constructs with its question construction. Also, the current study focuses on middle school. Studies indicate that bullying occurs at all grade and school levels (Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Harris & Petrie, 2000; Olweus, 1993; Pynoos & Nader, 1988); however, it is beyond the scope of the current study to sufficiently address more than the detailed school constructs.

Since the current study was designed only to evaluate middle school students in rural settings, generalizability of the results is a concern. Data will be collected from schools in rural settings in the south, which limits the use of the results for more metropolitan school settings and possibly schools in dissimilar geographic regions.

Summary

The need to assess bullying has been addressed in a number of different ways. It is essential to know the extent of the problem before a solution can be reached. The idea

of defining bullying is complex and difficult to achieve (Harris & Petrie, 2003). Bullying and victimization as an area of study has seen a number of assessments with varying degrees of success. There have also been a number of definitions devised to explain what constitutes bullying (Coloroso, 2003; Olweus, 1991; Rigby, 1996). The current study incorporated a variety of construct measures in an attempt to achieve more robust assessment results.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a belief among some people that human existence sustains itself on the idea that only the strong survive. This ideology is attributed to human nature. If we are to believe that “Only the strong survive”, then we can also assume that the problem of bullying in schools is easy to explain, understand, and remediate. Authors McCabe and Martin (2005) noted in their book, *School Violence, The Media, + Criminal Justice Responses*, that school bullying has generally been considered “a rite of passage” for years. The notion that bullying is something that just happens and that the experience of being a victim of bullying must be lived through has changed in the past quarter century.

What Is Bullying

The problem of bullying and victimization has seen an increasing number of researchers who are interested in the dynamic. Researcher interest has not been limited to schools, children, and teenagers. There have been a number of studies on the bully/victim dynamic as it relates to adults, work environment, and even managerial style. It seems that bullying has become more than just a passing series of incidents in time, but a more systematic issue in a broader sense. Ultimately, while bullying is an age-old practice, it has lately been the focus of much discussion relative to definition and identification, as well as to possible interventions that could help eliminate it from school settings.

Bullying and, by relation, victimization has seemingly always been a part of school culture and, to a wider extent, society as a whole.

Bullying in schools is a problem that can be seen on a global scale (Rigby, 2002; Smith, Morita, Junger-Tas, Olweus, Catalano, & Slee, 2001). European researchers provided the initial attempt to view bullying as an area of study because of the seeming pervasiveness with which bullying behavior was seen in schools. Dan Olweus, a researcher from Scandinavia (Norway by way of Sweden), is generally considered an authority on bullying, bullying assessment, and bullying intervention. His research interest since the mid-1970s has been centered on bullying. Olweus wrote about bullying (referred to as mobbing or mobbning) in 1973 and 1978. His works laid the foundation for what has become a burgeoning field of concern for parents, teachers, researchers, and society as a whole.

Mobbing vs. Bullying

Heinemann's work. Although Olweus was the first to conduct a large scale bullying (mobbing) study, he was not the first to use the term "mobbing" to describe children's behavior. During the late 1960s and 1970s researcher Peter-Paul Heinemann (1972) originally used the word mobbing (mobbning) as apart of the media debate regarding the ganging-up of students against peers in schools. Heinemann proposed the need to label violence that occurs in Swedish schools and chose to adopt the word "mobbing" (Swedish translation "mobbning") for the purpose of opening discussion with an accurate description of what was going on (Heinemann, 1972). Mobbing is characterized by violence initiated by a group against any that is considered different from the norm (Heinemann, 1973).

Mobbing, as it refers to the English equivalent of bullying, was further distinguished as a dichotomous phenomenon of either collective mobbing or organized mobbing (Nielsen & Stigendal, 1973). Both types of mobbing refer to groups of children ganging up on peers. Collective mobbing refers to bullying peers as the situation directs. An example of collective mobbing includes a group of students aggravating other classmates, in an attempt to initiate a physical altercation. Organized mobbing entails a social component. Organized mobbing can be characterized by a peer group of students (a team or clique) who physically terrorize another student.

Pikas (1975) followed the work of Nielson and Stigendal by adding to the definition of mobbing. The identification of collective mobbing, while substantiated by one study (Kivisto, 1977), was generally dispelled by another (Olweus, 1978). Olweus argued that mobbing is not the norm and that individual bullying was the more significant phenomenon. Although Olweus' findings point away from mobbing as a general practice, he did advise further study of organized mobbing by saying "it is reasonable to expect that bullying by several peers is more unpleasant and possibly more detrimental to the victim" (Olweus, 1993, p. 9).

Olweus' work. Olweus' findings changed the language of the field and initiated the future focus of the study of inappropriate and violent peer interactions. Research moved from the study of mobbing as the field standard, to the examination of (individual) bullying as the focus. The term mobbing to describe interactions between students, and the balance of power that is sometimes evident, was not supported by the research that Olweus was conducting. Olweus began to define bullying through descriptive means based on his research findings. This difference was evident as Heinemann's choice to use

mobbing was fueled by society's popular use of the term. Olweus' definition of bullying was derived specifically from the data presented.

Researchers from other areas of the globe have taken what Olweus began and furthered study in the area of bullying. In some cases, the research in other countries regarding bullying-like behavior is just as robust, albeit independent, as detailed by the work of Morita, Soeda, Soeda, and Taki (1999). In Japan, bullying research has been conducted since the late 1980s (Kanetsuna, Smith, & Morita, 2006). The term bullying does not have an exact translation in Japan; therefore, the term "ijime" is used as it is close in translation (Morita, 1996). Through the work of Olweus and subsequent researchers, bullying is now the primary term used as opposed to the term mobbing, in English speaking countries. In other countries the close equivalent word is used to describe all things that fall under the bullying umbrella.

Defining Bullying

The importance of terminology is clear when attempting to define bullying in clear, understandable, and observable terms. The initial research regarding bullying was limited to the societal views of what constituted bullying. Most of these views were predicated by the experiences individual members of the population had regarding bullying. In some of these cases, how one felt (and how some currently feel) about bullying is based on their position in the bully/victim dynamic. The positions of bully, victim, or bystander influenced the perception of the problem.

Heinemann (1972) first used the term mobbing to describe bullying. Mobbing was considered a group of children violently interacting with an individual child (Heinemann, 1972; Olweus, 1973). The interactions were described as not only violent, but at times

they were perpetrated by anonymous groups of children, similar to a lynch mob. Lacerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Berts, and King (1982) described an example of mobbing as an entire class, or the majority of it, turning against one individual pupil, who usually is deviant in one respect or another. Heinemann's definition of mobbing, while broad, allowed for a more accurate description of the phenomenon.

Nielsen and Stigendal (1973) expanded the definition of mobbing by dividing the term into two categories (collective mobbing and organized mobbing). Collective mobbing is aggression by a group of students that is situationally determined. Collective mobbing was substantiated by Kivisto (1977) as he found that 2/3 of children in four schools in Helsinki actively bullied other peers in mobbing situations. Most of the students also indicated that bullying was outside their normal behavior, but were compelled to participate because of the situation. Organized mobbing reflects the social relationships within a group. The presence of organized mobbing in schools was the catalyst for Heinemann's work in the area of mobbing, as the mass media were beginning to focus on ganging-up in schools.

The change from the term mobbing to the more accurate term of bullying was facilitated by the work of Dan Olweus. The functional definition of mobbing referred to groups of students picking on one student, and the use of serious, often violent, interactions and harassment. Olweus conducted two countrywide assessments, one in Norway and the other in Sweden, to determine the prevalence of bullying in both countries (Olweus, 1993). Olweus' studies helped determine specific contexts in which bullying behavior occurred. At the conclusion of the studies, Olweus was able to extrapolate from the data some common themes regarding how bullying occurs. These

themes were then used as the guide for a more accurate definition of what bullying is and what bullying is not.

Olweus (1978) devised a theoretical framework of what constitutes bullying. Olweus's theory involved bullying as negative actions against someone or group over time. Through his studies, Olweus (1986 and 1991) was able to support his theoretical description of bullying based on his findings. The data collected allowed for a clearer picture of what happens between bullies and victims and how, at times, students do not fall into simple dichotomous categories. In his 1993 book *Bullying At School: What We Know and What Can We Do*, Olweus defined bullying and victimization in this way: "A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (p. 9). Olweus went on to elaborate on the term "negative actions" as it was used in his definition. "Negative actions" refers to any attempt to intentionally injure or cause discomfort to another. Threats, taunts, teasing, calling names, hitting, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining an individual from physically protecting oneself against attack are all forms of negative actions. There are also non-physical and wordless forms of negative actions including making faces, dirty gestures, refusing to comply with one's wishes, or intentional group exclusion.

Olweus was able to refine the definition of bullying through the data he collected. In an effort to streamline the definitions of bullying, emphasis was placed on the negative actions being carried out repeatedly and over a period of time. While it is noted that bullying can be a one-time event, Olweus contended that repeated negative interactions are an indicator of a chronic problem with bullying. Bullies and victims can be

individuals or groups. It was concluded that, in school settings, victims are overwhelmingly individual students, while the bullies are generally groups of two or three students.

Another aspect of bullying is the issue of power. Olweus (1991) concluded that bullying occurs when there is an imbalance of power. Olweus explained an imbalance of power as an asymmetric power relationship. This asymmetric relationship is shown when a student exposed to negative actions has difficulty defending him/herself from student (or a group of students) harassment.

Since the initial work of Olweus and Heinemann, there have been a number of studies that have been conducted to further the discussion on the definition of bullying. Generally, research has been conducted to develop a more concise definition as to what constitutes bullying. While some studies have been conducted to enhance the previous research, other studies bring novel concepts to the field of study.

Coloroso (2003) furthered the idea of power imbalance by identifying specific contexts in which imbalances of power can be seen. In his book, *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander*, Coloroso assigns the imbalances to the areas of:

- Age (older students bullying younger students)
- Physical stature (bigger or stronger students bullying weaker students)
- Cognitive ability (smarter students bullying students with less cognitive ability)
- Social economic status (richer students bullying poorer students).

While not included in the book, the area of social status (particularly in the school setting) should be considered. It is reasonable to believe that some popular students bully those students who are less popular.

Tattum and Tattum (1992) defined bullying as a conscientious choice on the part of the bully. Furthermore, bullies desire to hurt others or, at the very least, put others in a stressful state. Power imbalance remains a familiar aspect of the bullying/victim dynamic. Bullying as a tool of oppression over less powerful persons (physically or psychologically) is the crux of the interactions between bullies and victims (Farrington 1993).

Australian researcher Ken Rigby (1996 and 2002) introduced the concept of malign and non-malign bullying. Malign bullying consists of the bully not only being aware of his/her actions, but also getting a sense of enjoyment in making the victim(s) feel powerless and oppressed. As a consolidation of previous definitions, malign bullying consists of seven elements:

1. the bullies desire to cause harm,
2. bullying behavior manifested into action,
3. bullying behavior resulting in the hurting of others,
4. bullying behavior as a power imbalance,
5. victims being bullied without provocation,
6. bullies repeating their behavior over a victim for a repeated over time, and
7. enjoyment by the bully in oppressing or hurting the weaker victim.

Rigby (2001) developed a formula for the identification of maligned bullying as the following:

> Bullying involves a desire to hurt + hurtful action + a power imbalance + (typically) repetition + an unjust use of power + evident enjoyment by the aggressor and a sense of being oppressed on the part of the victim. (p. 11)

Non-malign bullying differs slightly from malign bullying. The major difference between maligned and non-maligned bullying is the intent. The bully does not desire to hurt the victim. More accurately, the bully is unaware of the effects that his/her actions may have on a victim. Non-maligned bullying is tantamount to playful teasing as opposed to outright bullying. Although considered less harmful, it should not be ignored or marginalized. It can be difficult for teachers, parents, and even peers to differentiate between teasing and non-maligned bullying.

Distinguishing between non-maligned bullying and teasing can be difficult. Since teasing is sometimes done among friends and peers to establish relationships it can be misconstrued as bullying. The intent determines whether a behavior is maligned bullying, non-maligned bullying, or playful teasing. If teasing is playful and done as apart of the group dynamic, it generally not considered bullying. If playful teasing becomes hurtful to the person being teased, while unbeknownst to the perpetrator and done consistently over a period of time, then it has become non-maligned bullying. Teasing others with the intention of causing distress is maligned bullying. Distinguishing between the three is paramount in providing the appropriate intervention.

Agreement on a definition is the first step in dealing with the problem of bullying. Once a definition is established, there arises another problem when researching and assessing bullying, with the issue of bullying type to be decided. Through the years,

research in the area of bullying has been introduced to better identify what bullying entails. A brief summary of bullying definitions can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Abbreviated Definitions of Bullying By Author and Year

Definition	Author/Year
Repeated negative actions by one or more peers	Olweus 1978
Conscience decision to oppress others	Tattum & Tattum 1992
Intentional (malign) or unintentional (non-malign) oppression	Rigby 1996
Age, physical, cognitive, or social imbalance of power	Coloroso 2003

Types of Bullying

Along with defining bullying, there are a number of different types of bullying that researchers have compartmentalized. Separating bullying into categorical types allows for greater discernment when assessing levels of bullying behavior. The assessment of a basic definition of bullying can give valuable information regarding the extent to which bullying occurs. The importance of identifying types of bullying is almost equal to defining bullying. When more precise information can be collected regarding bullying, successful intervention can occur. Bullying types include:

- physical
- verbal
- relational
- direct

- indirect
- sexual
- cyber/internet

Physical bullying. Traditionally, physical bullying is the form of bullying that most people consider common. Physical bullying is characterized by physical interaction between the bully and the victim (Crick, 1996). Physical interaction can include hitting, kicking, slapping, pinching, biting, poking and choking (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). Physical bullying also can include the destruction of personal belongings. It is generally believed that physical bullying is the most common type of bullying in schools. Most of the bullying that is shown in popular culture is physical bullying, since it is the most obvious type of bullying. Physical bullying is easy to identify, usually making known to most students in school who is being bullied. Younger students engage in less physical bullying than older students and, as the students get older, the physical interactions can become more aggressive and violent.

Verbal bullying. Verbal bullying is a form of bullying the does not include physical interaction, but can be just as harming. *The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* (2001) describes verbal bullying as usually including name-calling or threats. Verbal bullying can also include teasing, spreading rumors, racial slurs, cruel criticism, and blackmailing other students. Verbal bullying is meant to cause distress and embarrassment. Verbal bullying can take place in person, over the phone and in e-mail. The nature of verbal bullying makes it the easiest form of bullying to be overlooked.

Relational bullying. Relational bullying is probably the most underrated form of bullying and is generally overlooked (Harachi, Catalano, & Hawkins, 1999). Relational

bullying can also be known as emotional or psychological bullying (JAMA, 2001), or exclusionary or social bullying. Ignoring, isolating, excluding, shunning, and making others feel unwelcome are all elements of relational bullying. Relational bullying is less visible and requires a keen since of observation to detect. In the case of younger students, relational bullying is mostly when people do not allow someone else to play with them. As students become older, relational bullying can become a more sinister act. Emotional distress is closely associated with relational bullying (Hawker, 1998). In recent years, relational bullying has garnered more attention in the United States via books and movies. Unfortunately, most of the focus on relational bullying has been connected to female interactions. Social bullying is considered the worst form of bullying from individuals who identify themselves as victims (Sharp, 1995).

The recent movie “Mean Girls” (2004) (http://www.imdb.com/, 2007) highlights the various ways in which high school students (particularly female) use bullying as a way to operate in the social context of school. The main character must maneuver her way between two social groups in school, the Outcasts and the Plastics (what the popular girls are referred to based on their stiff and fake personality traits). The Plastics use a number of deceitful, harmful, and mean actions to get what they want or, worse, to make other students the butt of their jokes. The movie is a fictional portrayal of female social systems in high school; however, it is based on the book by Rosalind Wiseman called "Queen Bees and Wannabes” (2003), which is an examination of the extent to which girls are bullied, bullies, or pressured into bullying others. Although the movie (or the book) did not end with a violent act against anyone, it helps paint the picture and dispels the

idea that bullying is simply a “boys will be boys” thing, and shows what could be going on in schools among peers that could lead to violence.

Direct bullying. Olweus (1993) explained direct bullying as interactions between bullies and victims that are “relatively open attacks”. Direct bullying is easily recognized, which can add a feeling of embarrassment for victims. The public nature of the attacks can result in more obvious signs of abuse. Most of the verbal and physical bullying behaviors fall into the category of direct bullying (Harris & Petrie, 2003; O’Moore & Minton, 2004). Some specific bullying behaviors that can be considered direct bullying include:

- hitting and pushing,
- name calling and taunting,
- threatening gestures,
- stealing or hiding others’ property, and
- any other physically or verbally overt acts of intimidation and/or oppression.

Indirect bullying. The polar opposite of direct bullying is indirect bullying. Less subtle in nature, indirect bullying is equally, if not more serious, than direct bullying. Indirect bullying is seen in the form of isolation and intentional social exclusion. O’Moore and Minton (2004) noted that indirect bullying can be more covert and is specifically designed to create uncomfortable social situations for those who are victims. Social relationships are manipulated and result in making others dislike, mistrust, or socially isolate others. Some common behaviors associated with indirect bullying include:

- Influencing others to taunt, tease, and/or criticize
- Purposefully spreading rumors or excluding others from social situations
- Making anonymous threats via phone or technological means
- Writing or spreading false information about others.

Sexual bullying. Increasingly, schools have to deal with the issue of sexual bullying among students. The problem with sexual bullying is not limited to female students, as some may believe. Sexual bullying is behavior that is based on a person's sexuality or gender characteristics. Students who are sexual bullies can be either boys or girls, and the bullying can be carried out directly or indirectly. Sexual bullying based on a person's sexual preference usually pertains to bullying that is homophobic in nature. Unwanted words and actions describe sexual bullying (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 2001). Some behaviors that are associated with sexual bullying include:

- sexual jokes, taunts, and/or comments,
- teasing or spreading rumors regarding sexual orientation or sexual activities,
- unwarranted sexual physical contact, and
- unwanted sexual displays.

Cyberbullying. The latest research in the area of bullying has identified a new form of bullying. Technological advances have created broader opportunities to bully, and to bully anonymously. Technology has created the introduction of cyberbullying. Belsey (2004) defined bullying as:

> The use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal Web

> sites, and defamatory online personal polling Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others. (p. 9)

The conditions in which cyberbullying occurs are the same as any other bullying. The ubiquitous nature of technology has allowed bullying to become more inclusive. Cyberbullying has quickly become the method of choice for students because of the seemingly anonymity of cyberspace. There are multiple types of cyberbullying, but they are dependent on the type of technology that is available to the bully. Cell phones, computers, text messages, and instant messenger services allow for bullies to share their bullying behavior with others. While not physically direct bullying, cyberbullying takes the form of relational and indirect bullying. Cyberbullying could include the spreading of rumors or incriminating information to large groups of students instantly. Social exclusion can also be applied in cyberspace, as students may not want to "add" their victims as friends and tell others not to do so on social networking sites.

Cyberbullying can become a more damaging bullying method in that students can assume the identity of a victim and create conflicting social relationships with others. A recent newspaper article (Maag, 2007) highlights the danger of cyberbullying. The article tells the story of a 13-year old girl who committed suicide based upon interactions (first flirty, next malicious), with a 16-year old boy on the social network Myspace.com. The suicide of a 13-year old girl is sad enough; however, it became more troubling when it was discovered that the 16-year old boy was a fictitious creation of a rival girl's mother. Unfortunately, this story is not an isolated incident; while the ending is extreme, it is not rare. Table 2 provides a matrix of types of bullying and examples of each.

Table 2

Types and Examples of Bullying Matrix

	Direct	Indirect
Physical	Hitting, Kicking, Punching	Influencing others to hit
Verbal	Taunting, Threatening	Phone calls, Spreading rumors
Relational	Menacing gestures, ignoring	Purposeful exclusion
Sexual	Inappropriate touching	Spreading sexual rumors
Cyber	Sending harmful text messages	Passing harmful text messages

The initial step in knowing if something exists is examining what is known and defining it. Bullying is no different; yet, it holds a unique characteristic apart from most other fields of research. While bullying research is relatively new, being only decades old, individuals have always had a sense as to what bullying is, what bullies do, and what it is like to be bullied. Bullying has been in schools and existed as a concept in popular culture well before research in the field began. Parents who currently have students in elementary, middle, and high school can attest to their own experiences with bullying when they were in school. Some parents my have experienced any number of types of bullying while in school. By identifying types of bullying, more concise definitions can be developed, thus leading to better assessments and successful interventions to combat bullying in the school setting.

Assessing Bullying Behavior

In his book *Bullying From Both Sides*, Roberts (2006) summarized the problems with assessing bullying by stating the following:

> Facts and figures abound. Definitions of what is an incident of bullying or teasing and how questions are asked make the numbers say different things. Like the fable of the blind men and the elephant, depending on which part of the element one has examined, that becomes the reality. (p. 3)

The implication associated with the Roberts' quote is that there is no way of knowing the extent of bullying as a problem in schools, and although we know it is there, there are conflicting reports as to how big or small the problem could be.

The growing diversity of research in the area of bullying presents a unique problem relative to assessment. The abundance of definitions and types allows for some overlap, but does not guarantee sameness. The many definitions bullying and how to assess bullying give a number of estimates that can be misleading (Harachi, Catalano & Hawkins, 1999). A United States Department of Justice report (Simpson, 2002) noted:

> In addition, in the United States, the lack of a galvanized focus on bullying has resulted in a lack of large-scale school research efforts (such as those in Scandinavia, England, Japan, and Australia). Thus we have only limited insights into the problem of bullying here.

The varying percentages of students who identify themselves as being bullied are dependent on the type of assessment tool used. How bullying is defined, the type of bullying being assessed, the time frame involved and a number of other factors can influence the prevalence of bullying. Although assessments differ, a majority of the research indicates that bullying is a problem in schools (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005; Espelage & Swearer, 2004, Garrett 2003).

Bullying assessment is conducted according to a number of different theories. Each researcher develops individual theoretical frameworks. Prior to beginning any study of bullying, researchers must identify what factors will be studied and how the data will be collected. Most instruments used for the purposes of assessing bullying do so by evaluating a theoretical dynamic. These dynamics may be based on a continuum (teasing-bullying continuum), categorical (role identification), type (traditional bullying vs. cyberbullying), or through theoretical models (social-ecological) for evaluation. There are a number of assessment strategies that researchers can adapt for their own studies.

The teasing–bullying continuum. Research has shown that bullying occurs on a continuum of severity (Byrne, 1993; Holt, Finkelhor, & Kantor, 2007). It has been suggested by The National School Safety Center (Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, & Short-Camili, 1996) that the bullying continuum can be categorized into a three-tier model (mild, moderate, and severe). Some examples of the continuum include: taunting and/or minor pushing (mild); slurs, intimidation, and/or intentional physical violence (moderate), and intentional social isolation, regular intimidation, and/or inflicting bodily harm (severe) Garrity et al. (1996). Horne, Bartolocucci, and Newman-Carlson (2003) proposed a similar continuum for bullying behavior, along with continuums of childhood aggressive play and delinquency. All of the proposed theories of bullying continuums display bullying behavior as intensifying in nature. Progression along the bullying continuum from mild to severe seems to parallel the progression from indirect to direct.

Role identification. Collecting data on bullying reveals that students assign themselves into the categories of victim, bully, bully-victim, or bystander (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000; Orpinas & Horne, 2006; Unnever, 2005). Classification into

these categories is highlighted by victimization identification. Most of the assessment tools take the form of self-report as individual students identify themselves as bully, victim, bully-victim, or bystander.

Roberts (2006) reported that students who label themselves victims, identify three reasons for their position of victim. Imbalances in social status, special need, or sexual identity are the underlying reasons why students report being victims of bullying. Orpinas and Horne (2006) detail three types of victims: passive, provocative, and relational. Passive victims are intentionally bullied with little or no provocation (Olweus, 1993). Proactive victims antagonize others, thus inviting bullying from their peers (Boulton & Smith, 1994). Victims identifying themselves as relational divulge that bullying usually occurs in the form of name-calling, taunting, or spreading rumors to large groups of peers.

Aside from identifying victims of bullying, one of the main purposes of bullying assessment instruments is to identify bullying or, at the very least, the prevalence of bullying behavior in the school setting. Researchers have investigated who bullies are, when bullies victimize students, and how to intervene to reduce or stop bullying behavior. Aggressive bullies, bullies that follow, and relational bullies have all been identified as bullying types by Orpinas and Horne (2006). Probably the most recognizable bullying is aggressive bullying that includes the use of direct, verbal or physical bullying to harm or intimidate victims. Followers sometimes bully because they want to fit in or impress other more aggressive bullies, or they just may prod more aggressive bullies on. Relational bullies use indirect bullying tactics, which can be undetectable, to cause victims harm by placing them in uncomfortable or embarrassing

social situations. Typically the unwanted (and in most cases unwarranted) social situations can be caused through isolation, ostracizing, or sabotage.

In recent years, a number of researchers have found that bullies and victims cannot be placed exclusively in dichotomous groups because a number of victims also identify themselves as bullies or exhibit bullying behavior (Haynie, Nansel, Eitel, Crump, Saylor, Yu, & Simons-Morton, 2001; Ross, 1996). Olweus (1994) found that 17% of children in schools who characterized themselves as victims also characterized themselves as bullies to other children. Several studies highlight a circumstantial element regarding students being both bully and victim based on being around certain peers (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Snell, MacKensie, & Frey, 2001; Tobin & Irvin, 1996; Walker, Colvin, & Ramesy, 1995).

Bystanders have been generally ignored in the bully/victim dynamic; however, increasingly more researchers are recognizing the effects and influence that bystanders can have as part of the peer group of bullies and victims (Hazler, 1996). Harris and Petrie (2003) reported that students who identify themselves as bystanders feel one of two ways relative to their experiences with bullies. Bystanders feel guilty for watching bullying and not intervening (Newman, Horne, & Bartolomucci, 2000), or they feel apathetic as it is "none of their business" to get involved on behalf of victims. Further, Orpinas and Horne (2006) suggested that bystanders can be characterized into two broad groups, either part of the problem or part of the solution. Bystanders who are part of the problem may encourage bullying or watch bullying happen as entertainment, essentially condoning the situation (Slaby, Wilson-Brewer, & Dash, 1994). Bystanders who are part of the solution find ways to diffuse the situation or intervene on behalf of the victim.

Grade level. The general consensus is that, at different grade levels, bullying varies in occurrence, type, and intensity in an integrated fashion (Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Harris & Petrie, 2000; Olweus, 1993). Bullying has been identified as early as preschool (Pynoos & Nader, 1988). There are difficulties associated with assessing bullying in early years based on knowledge level and understanding. Pynoos and Nader (1988) highlighted some common feelings and behaviors for students in preschool through second grade that could be used to determine if bullying is occurring. These bullying responses include:

- Fearfulness
- Confusion
- Verbalization problems related to bothering behaviors
- Clinginess.

Students in third through fifth grade respond to bullying in different ways, as they are better able to verbalize if bullying is happening. Some of the feelings or behaviors that upper elementary students exhibit include:

- Guiltiness
- Inability to sleep
- Inconsistency, recklessness, or aggression
- Safety concerns.

More often than not, elementary bullying is identified as teasing behavior (Khosropour & Walsh, 2001).

Students in grades six through eight typically have the most experience with bullying. Research has shown that 80% of students in middle school bully others (Hoover

& Oliver, 1995). During the middle school years, the differences in how students identify themselves begin to emerge. Bullies, victims, bully-victims, and bystanders and their respective roles become obvious in middle school where social interaction and belonging to social groups mean the most.

It is essential that bullying intervention be considered a priority in high schools because students are less likely to report bullying (Petrie & Harris, 2003). In the absence of reporting bullying, some students turn to violence to handle their problems with bullies. Increasingly high profile instances of school violence (particularly shootings) have made the assessment of bullying at the high school level a necessary focus for school administration. Gender differences in bullying and how that predicts bullying types are seen during high school.

Other theoretical frameworks. Along with the well-established theoretical frameworks used to assess bullying, there are a number of newer theories developed by researchers in an effort to further the study of bullying and victimization and the prevalence of both. In their book, *Bullying in American Schools*, authors Espelage and Swearer used a social-ecological theory to assess bullying in schools. Espelage and Swearer (2004) based their use of the social-ecological theory on an ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). The social-ecological theory attempts to explain how students identify themselves in a social construct (bully, bully-victim, victim, or bystander) as related to an ecological construct (culture, community, school/peers, and family) (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). Behavior is predicated on the role that each student assumes in each social ecology (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000).

Plaford (2006) applied a cognitive-emotional approach to understanding bullies and victims and explaining bullying behavior. Plaford (2006) used brain development as the crux of his theory to describe bullying behavior as a function of what and how students have learned. Although Plaford focused heavily on bullying intervention through two concepts (external and internal interventions), he suggested that any assessment of bullying should include questions that are easy to conceptualize and visual for students to answer. Plaford also recommended that emotional and cognitive intelligence be taken into account for any assessment and intervention.

Given concerns of parents who have children in school and the increasingly violent consequences that ignoring the problem can have, assessing the prevalence of bullying has become a priority for schools. School violence and the quick dissemination of news about that violence have made bullying assessment a public priority. In an effort to hurriedly come up with a solution to their bullying problems, schools have taken an "at least we will be doing something" policy to assess the prevalence of bullying. Unfortunately, the numerous theoretical frameworks that are the foundation of bullying assessment make it difficult to compare data equally or accurately.

Commonly Used Scales

As observed by Harachi, Catalano, and Hawkins (1999), the varied number of bullying/victimization surveys causes problems in that they provide different contexts in which bullying and/or victimization is measured. There have been few studies of that compare the validity of the measures. Since there is no definitive assessment tool for bullying, comparing the validity of one survey to another might result in data; however,

the impact, usefulness, and importance of these data may be difficult to determine. Generally, bullying/victimization scales fall into two categories, self-reports or alternative assessments.

The self-report assessments are generally norm-referenced surveys. The self-report surveys either require responders to identify their role or experience with bullying or victimization or report their observations of bullying or victimization. The most popular self-report assessments are:

- Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire
- Reynolds Bully Victimization Scale.

Norm-referenced self-reports compare the scores of individuals who have recently taken the assessment to the standards set by previous takers.

Alternative assessments provide teachers with qualitative data on students that may help identify potential bullies or victims. The focus of alternative assessments is to provide detailed information from students regarding their experiences with bullying. Some of the alternative assessments used to gain a picture of the severity of bullying or identify possible bullies or victims include:

- Teacher Reports
- Peer Nominations.

Both self-report surveys and alternative assessments lack evidence regarding their empirical validity and reliability (Griffin & Gross 2004). Determined to intervene against bullying and victimization, school systems have decided it best to begin an assessment and program in the absence of validity or reliability data, in an effort to appear proactive.

The lack of reliability or validity data has been cited as a major problem of bullying self-reports (Cornell & Loper, 1998) and bullying assessment in general (Beane, 1999).

Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire

The Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire is considered the first bullying assessment instrument to be used for collection of large-scale data. Olweus (1983, 1987, 1993, 1996) began a countrywide assessment of bullying in Norway and Sweden. Subsequent studies have allowed Olweus to refine his assessment and corresponding intervention program. The revised version of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus, 1996) is widely used for assessment purposes; however, there are limited validity and reliability data available.

The Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire assessment manual reports a range of internal validity between .80 (when using individual students as units of measure) and .90 (when using the school as a whole as the unit of measure) using Cronbach's alpha. Reliability data were not available in the manual; however, Olweus provided some insight in an article footnote regarding reliability data in sample question sets (Olweus, 1994). Lee, Cornell, and Cole (2006) conducted a concurrent validity study between the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire and one form of alternative assessment (peer nomination). The researchers found a weak correlation (r = .12) between the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire self-report of being a bully and peer nomination of identified bullies. A moderate correlation (r = .42, p = < .05) was found between self-report of being a victim of bullying and peer nomination of victims.

Reynolds Bully Victimization Scale

The Bullying/Victimization Scale (BVS) (Reynolds, 2003) was designed to assess bullying behavior and identify students who are considered victims of bullying. The scale is divided into two sections (Victimization and Bullying). The scale uses a self-report data collection method. Reynolds reports an internal consistency of .93 for the score on the Bully Scale and Victimization Scale (Reynolds, 2003a).

Alternative Assessments

While self-reports are generally formal assessments with set procedures and instructions, they have flaws. Using alternative assessments has provided teachers and school personnel with valuable information regarding the bullying climate of a school or classroom, and has alerted teachers as to students who are susceptible of becoming bullies or victims.

Teacher Reports

Teacher reports are commonly used in school settings as a means of sharing information. The camaraderie that most teachers share has always resulted in the passing of valuable information from one teacher to the next. Informal meetings in hallways and break rooms have lead to teachers sharing what they know about students who are bullies and/or victims. When bullying becomes a chronic problem, teachers who have documented the incidents can make a compelling case regarding the severity of the problem thus, initiating more formal means of dealing with bullying.

Teacher reports have also included the use of behavior assessment tools. The Revised Behavior Problem Checklist (RBPC; Quay & Peterson, 1996) and the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC, Reynolds & Kamphus, 1991) are both used by

teachers as ways of measuring students' behavior. While the RBPC and BASC are not specifically for identifying bullies or victims, they both have provided evidence about students who may be susceptible to being a bully or victim through observations of behavior. As formal measures, behavior assessment tools have strengthened evidence of suspected cases of victimization.

Peer Nominations

Also described as sociometric scales, peer nomination assessments allow students to identify peers who may be bullies or victims, depending on how the questions are posed. Peer nomination assessments are familiar components to the educational setting (Terry & Coie, 1991). Teachers have used peer nominations to validate suspicions or to discover previously unknown information as to which students are possible bullies and victims. Terry and Coie (1991) reported that peer sociometric assessments, including peer nominations and peer rating scales, show high concurrent and predictive validity. Espelage and Swearer (2004) noted that since peers have more prolonged contact opportunities with classmates, sociometric assessments (i.e., peer nominations) are a more appropriate measurement tool for identifying bullies and/or victims of bullying.

Assessments are meant to provide the necessary information before, during, and after an intervention is used. Bullying interventions are not started without an assessment of the severity of the bullying problem. While schools have the best intentions, the seemingly unlimited availability of choices for assessment tools has made it difficult to know which assessment should be used. Most commercial bullying intervention programs include bullying assessment instruments. Evidence of the appropriateness and the quality of these instruments has yet to be established. Bullying and victimization

assessment has suffered from broad and changing definitions of what is considered bullying. The theoretical frameworks used to develop assessment instruments are usually where the emphasis of research lies; however, in the area of bullying research, equal attention should be given to establishing the reliability and validity of the instruments created and used for assessing bullying. Once strong reliability and validity data have been established, stakeholders interested in decreasing bullying can be confident that interventions used can be effective.

Conclusion

There is general consensus that bullying behavior is abhorrent and must be addressed and stopped if possible. There is also consensus that bullying behavior is characterized by imbalances of power. The issue of how to decrease bullying and make children and adolescents understand that bullying is something that should be discouraged is where the real struggle lies. The global community has done little to make bullying less desirable. Politics, popular culture, entertainment, employment, and a host of other areas sometimes present bullying as something to be frowned upon, yet at other times applauded. The messages sent to students are unclear and contradictory. Bullying in schools can be said to be influenced by bullying everywhere else.

The field of bullying research, as it relates to children and adolescents, has seen exponential growth in the last 30 years. Attempts to be proactive against bullying and the negative behavioral consequences that have been associated with bullying have lead to the development of assessment tools, intervention strategies, and more studies. One of the problems that may arise from being proactive is the lack of uniformity and, by relation,

comparability. Doing something is better than doing nothing, is the philosophy that is taken. While there are some commonalities that exist among assessment instruments and interventions, the best route to take to reduce bullying in schools is difficult to ascertain. The foundation has been laid to begin developing a “better mousetrap”. By using the work from previous researchers, the creation of more encompassing and accurate assessment instruments for bullying is now possible.

III. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the author will discuss the methods and procedures used during the process of the study. Included in the discussion of the study will be a statement of purpose, statement of research questions, description of the sample population, details regarding the research procedure, and explanation of data analysis.

Purpose

The study attempted to determine if significant differences can be found between various demographic groups of middle school students when examining bullying by type. Type and intended demographic groups are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Bullying Types and Group Demographics

Primary Bullying Types
Verbal
Social/Relational
Physical
Sexual
Cyber
Demographic Groups
Gender
Age
Ethnicity

Specifically, the following research questions are addressed in the current study:

1. Is there a significant difference by gender when comparing perceptions of bullying by type (Social/Relational, Sexual, Cyber, Physical, and Verbal)?

2. Is there a significant difference by race/ethnicity when comparing perceptions of bullying by type (Social/Relational, Sexual, Cyber, Physical, and Verbal)?

3. Is there a significant difference by grade when comparing perceptions of bullying by type (Social/Relational, Sexual, Cyber, Physical, and Verbal)?

Participants

The participants of the study were drawn from the population of three middle schools, two in Alabama (Montevallo Middle School, MMS and Tuskegee Institute Middle School, TIMS) and one in Georgia (Heard County Middle School, HCMS). Each middle school is considered to be in a rural setting. All three middle schools accommodate students from sixth through eight grades. The demographic data of each school is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Demographic Characteristics of the Participating Schools

	Schools			
	MMS	TIMS	HCMS	Total
Student Population	305	734	496	1535
Per Grade (6/7/8)	98/109/98	206/252/276	156/176/164	460/537/538
Gender% (M/F)	58%/42%	55%/45%	52%/48%	55%/45%
Race% (W/B/O*)	62%/33%/5%	0%/100%/0%	86%/11%/3%	49%/48%/3%
Free/Reduce Lunch%	44%/12%	87%/5%	43%/10%	58%/9%

**Percentage of students ethnically other than White or Black*

Sampling Procedure

A convenience sampling methodology was used as access to schools was based upon permission given by the principals of each of the three schools after the research proposal was discussed in detail.

Variables

Independent Variables

Middle school students were chosen as the sample population based upon previous research in the field of bullying, which indicates that students experience increased amounts of bullying and victimization during this educational period (Hazler, 1996; Haynie, Nansel, Eitel, Crump, Saylor, Yu, & Morton-Simons, 2001; McCabe & Martin, 2005; Rigby, 1996). The participants' perception of bullying occurring to themselves and others form the dependent variables in this study. Participants will be aggregated to various groups as the independent variables (grade, ethnicity, and gender) and compared to observe any significant differences.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable will be each participant in the study identifying a) the prevalence of bullying in their school, and b) the types of bullying that may be occurring in their school (physical, verbal, social/relational, sexual, and/or cyber). Participants will complete a modified version of a multi-modal survey (The School Bullying Survey; Williams, 2007) designed to investigate bullying behavior in schools.

Instrumentation

The survey that will be used for the study is a modification of an existing survey entitled The School Bullying Survey developed by Esther Williams (2007). The original survey was developed to report individual perceptions of bullying in his/her school and to confide if he/she were a victim of bullying. Modifications to the survey were designed to

provide more detailed information regarding the perception of bullying behavior in schools.

The original survey only provided information regarding bullying as one construct. For the purposes of the current research study, The School Bullying Survey was modified to provide information regarding several specific bullying types (physical, social/relational, verbal, sexual, and cyber).

Both the original and modified versions of the survey are multi-modal allowing for participants to give detailed information regarding individual experiences with bully while in the school setting. The original and modified survey were written and designed for completion by students as young as 5th grade and as old as 12th grade. Verbal consent was given to modify the survey as needed for the purposes of the intended study by the original author of the study after a number of meetings and discussions.

The changes to the survey were made to increase the amount of information gathered through the questions. In the second section of the survey, regarding bullying by type, four questions were added to increase this section to ten. Adding the four questions ensured that each type of bullying was represented by two questions each. In the section to be answered by those who identify themselves as bullies, one question was modified and two questions were added. The questions that were added or modified were intended to provide additional information regarding bullying behavior by those who experience bullying in schools. Each question was designed asked specific information regarding who were the individuals perpetrating the bullying behaviors.

The original version of the School Bullying Survey was analyzed for the purposes of the current study for addition and modification. After close examination, the researcher

was able to identify and classify the questions on the survey into groups as different bullying types (physical, verbal, social/relational, sexual, and cyber). Questions were added to the survey to add robustness to the research study.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher was available at each school for a time period of 3–5 days, in an effort to maximize research participation. Every student at each school had an opportunity to participate in the research study. The researcher provided each student at each school with a sealed packet including an Auburn University approved Permission to Participate Form (Appendix A) and The School Bullying Survey (Appendix B). The original and modified versions of The School Bullying Survey were designed for those who participate in the survey to be anonymous as the survey did not require names. The survey did, however, contain items that are considered identify elements. The identifying elements included demographic questions of: age, grade, ethnicity, and gender. The data collections procedures enacted by the researcher were designed to eliminate the risk of identification for individuals who participated in the study. As the data will be reported in aggregate, the risk of identification for any specific participant in the study will be minimal.

In order to decrease risks to participants, particularly breach of confidentiality and coercion from teachers, the students could be required to take the packet home for parent/guardian review, and then allowed to return the packet directly to the researcher only. The researcher was available at each school for the students to return both the signed Parent Permission Forms and a completed copy of The School Bullying Survey in

a sealed envelope. The sealed envelopes containing the permission form and survey were only handled directly by the researcher, which were then placed in a sealed container for transport. The permission forms and surveys were separated and placed in a locked file cabinet owned by the researcher. Only students with signed permission forms and completed surveys were included in the research study.

Data Analysis

The data collected for the study were analyzed using SPSS v. 16.0. The researcher performed a descriptive analysis and a factorial multivariate analysis was conducted (MANOVA) on the data from The School Bullying Survey. The data were analyzed in aggregated by construct applicable to the research study. Each school was given reports regarding the data that were particular for that school. For the purposes of the current study, the data were compiled and grouped as a whole to provide a full account of bullying perception from the participants and to analyze significance.

Descriptive statistics were summarized and reported to each school, as the data suggest the extent to which bullying occurs in each school and how students perceive bullying behavior. Descriptive statistics reported include:

- The number of students who experience bullying regularly
- The places in which bullying occurs the most
- The prevalence of bullying by type
- The gender, relative age, and relative size of those who are considered bullies
- The perception of how school administration deals with bullying and bullies
- The prevalence of individuals who identify themselves as bullies

Specifically, MANOVA was used to analyze the data as the study involved multiple independent variables (gender, ethnicity, and grade; age was not included since in the case of middle school students it would cross load with grade) and dependent variables (physical, social, sexual, verbal, and cyber bullying). The School Bullying Survey contains specific questions that were designed to report the frequency of each participant's experiences with bullying through the dependant variable constructs determined by the researcher. MANOVA allowed for effects of each independent variable to be estimated separately (Salkind, 2000). Significance allows for the opportunity to provide precise identification of current problems in each school and better intervention strategies.

As the study was based upon assumptions of non-significances as related to the independent variables, if significance was found, post hoc follow-up analyses were performed. Any significant multivariate effect was further examined on the univariate level for each dependent variable. Significant interaction effects were followed up at the simple effects levels to determine the specific nature of how the independent variables interacted with each other. Finally, all main effects were followed up using post-hoc comparisons, specifically using a Bonferroni correction and a step-down analysis as suggested by the literature (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006). All statistical significance tests were evaluated using an alpha level of .05.

Summary

The current study examined the significance of bullying among rural middle school students by types and across various demographic factors. The extent to which

bullying occurs as reported by students can help address issues that affect school culture and climate. While the use of self-reports and surveys have inherent issues relating to methodology (Dillman, 2007; Fink, 1995), they are essential in identifying areas of concern for parents, teachers, and school administrators. This study and the use of The School Bullying Survey provides an example of how to collect and analyze student data to aid in the development of policy and procedure as it pertains to bullying in rural middle schools.

In the subsequent chapters, the author interprets and reports the findings from The School Bullying Survey data. A descriptive statistical analysis and a multivariant analysis of variables (MANOVA) were conducted with the data collected from the present study. Lastly, the researcher discusses the implications of the data analyses relating to limitations to the current study, areas of further and future research, and implications of the findings for the present study.

IV. RESULTS

The present study was an examination of the extent to which bullying behavior occurs in rural middle schools and the possible significance of bullying by type (physical, verbal, social/relational, sexual, and cyber) as experienced by participants through a variety of demographic independent variables (grade, ethnicity, and gender). Three schools were chosen for participation based upon the identifying trait of being in rural settings. The School Bullying Survey was given to the students for completion after parent consent was given for participation in the study. The survey was designed as a means to gather information regarding the level of bullying that may be occurring in schools (Williams, 2007). The survey uses quantitative and qualitative responses to increase understanding of the nature of bullying behavior. Descriptive statistical analysis, multivariate analysis (MANOVA) and appropriate follow-up analyses were conducted to assess the amount of bullying behavior that may be occurring in participating schools and statistical differences between genders, grades, and ethnicities of the participants as indicated by the research questions established for the current study.

Descriptive Statistics

Sampling and Procedures

Inclusion in the present study could only occur if: (a) a signed copy of the Parent Permission Form (Appendix A) was returned, and (b) the School Bullying Survey (Appendix B) was properly completed. After reviewing the returned study packets, the author concluded that a total of 186 students from the three participating schools met the criteria for inclusion in the present study. The questions on The School Bullying Survey were intended to evaluate various aspects of bullying behavior as perceived by the participants. The survey questions are grouped into constructs that included:

- Demographics
- General bullying experiences
- Specific bullying experiences by type (physical, verbal, social/relational, sexual, cyber)
- Location of bullying
- Self-identified victims experiences
- School climate

The demographic constructs of school, gender, ethnicity, grade and age participation data are presented in Tables 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 respectively.

Table 5

Participation by School

Schools	Frequency	Percentage
School 1	43	23.1
School 2	87	46.8
School 3	56	30.1

Table 6

Participation by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	56	30.1
Female	130	69.9

Table 7

Participation by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
White	96	51.6
Black	75	40.3
Other	15	8.0

Table 8

Participation by Grade

Grade	Frequency	Percentage
6th Grade	83	44.6
7th Grade	63	33.9
8th Grade	40	21.5

Table 9

Participation by Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
10 –11 year olds	23	12.4
12 –13 year olds	115	61.8
14 –15 year olds	48	25.8

There are five questions from the School Bullying Survey that constitute the general bullying experiences of the participants. These questions are:

1. Have you ever been bullied?
2. Have you ever been bullied at this school?
3. Have you been bullied at this school during the past year?
4. Have you been bullied at this school during the past month?
5. Have you been bullied at this school during the past week?

Table 10 displays the frequencies and percentages of participants' responses to the questions regarding the general bullying experiences.

Table 10

Participants' Responses to General Bullying[a]

General Bullying Questions	N[b] (%)
Have you ever been bullied?	104 (55.9)
Have you ever been bullied at this school?	80 (43.0)
Have you been bullied at this school during the past year?	71 (38.2)
Have you been bullied at this school during the past month?	40 (21.5)
Have you been bullied at this school during the past week?	20 (10.8)

[a] Total number of participants equal 186

[b] Number of participants who responded yes

The second section of the School Bullying Survey involved questions specifically regarding the types of bullying behavior that were experienced by participants within the previous thirty days of receiving the survey. Ten questions from the survey were designed to extract data representing five bullying types (physical, verbal, social/relational, sexual, and cyber). By identifying which type of bullying is occurring, interventions can be tailored to specific situations and/or victims (Fried & Fried, 1996; Garbarino & DeLara, 2002; Rigby, 1996). The questions from the section of the survey designed to report experiences by bullying type included:

1. How many times have you been threatened, teased, or rumored about by text message?
2. How many times have you been called names by others?
3. How many times have you been physically threatened or intimidated by others?
4. How many times have you been excluded or left out on purpose?
5. How many times have you experienced unwelcome sexual comments, gestures, or touching?
6. How many times have you been teased or threatened on a social network site or chat room?
7. How many times have you been ignored on purpose?
8. How many times have you been called names regarding your gender or sexual orientation?
9. How many times have you been teased in a way that made you feel uncomfortable?
10. How many times have you been hit, pushed, or kicked?

Table 11 displays the average frequencies and percentages from the participants' responses to the survey questions by type of bullying.

Table 11

Bullying Type and Participants' Responses per Type

Bullying Type (Question Numbers)[a]	Frequency (0 / 1-2 / 3-4 / 5+)[b]	Percentage (0 / 1-2 / 3-4 / 5+)[b]
Physical Bullying (Q3, Q10)	109 / 38 / 18 / 21	58.6 / 20.4 / 9.6 / 11.2
Verbal Bullying (Q2, Q9)	46 / 54 / 25 / 37	28.3 / 33.3 / 15.4 / 22.8
Social/Relational Bullying (Q4, Q7)	81 / 54 / 19 / 33	43.4 / 28.9 / 10.1 / 17.6
Cyber Bullying (Q1, Q6)	157 / 19 / 7 / 4	84.4 / 10.2 / 3.7 / 2.1
Sexual Bullying (Q5, Q8)	139 / 30 / 10 / 8	74.7 / 16.1 / 5.3 / 4.3

[a] Two questions were used to represent data from each bullying type

[b] Values represent means from responses per number of incidents reported by bullying type

At times, bullying behavior is a function of opportunity for bullies to victimize others when chances of being caught or punished are minimal (Rigby, 1996). The School Bullying Survey includes questions regarding the locations in which bullying behavior occurs through qualitative data measures. For the purposes of the present study, the researcher converted the qualitative responses to the various locations where bullying occurs into quantitative measures of number of places in which bullying behavior happens. Table 12 represents the quantitative conversions of the data collected regarding the number of locations in which participants have experienced bullying.

Table 12

Bullying Behavior by Number of Locations

Number of Bullying Locations[a]	Frequency	Percentage
1 Location	38	20.7
2 – 3 Locations	45	24.5
4 – 5 Locations	16	8.6
6 – 7 Locations	8	4.3

[a] Values represent students who reported being bullied within 30 days of receiving survey

The participants who identified themselves as victims of bullying were asked to respond to questions 17 through 21. These questions attempted to detail victim's experiences with bullies and bullying behavior. Ninety-eight participants identified themselves as being victims of bullying. The following results represent the responses to questions about specific experiences of bullying behavior from those who self-identify as victims of bullies.

1. When asked to identify the gender most responsible for bullying, 38 participants (38.8%) responded boys, 29 participants (29.6%) responded girls, and 31 participants (31.6%) responded both.
2. When asked the relative age of peers most responsible for bullying, 4 participants (4.1%) responded younger peers, 21 participants (21.4%)

responded older peers, 63 participants (64.3%) responded same age peers, and 10 participants (10.2%) responded more than one age group.

3. When asked the relative size of the peers most responsible for bullying, 29 participants (29.6%) responded bigger peers, 7 participants (7.1%) responded smaller peers, 42 participants (42.9%) responded same size peers, and 20 participants (20.4%) responded more than one size.
4. When asked whether they thought school officials or administrators aware of the bullying, 30 participants (30.6%) responded yes and 68 participants (69.4%) responded no.

Only students who responded yes to the question regarding the administrations awareness of bullying were asked state whether they were pleased with the way administration intervened against bullying. Thirty students indicated that school officials or administration were aware of bullying.

5. When asked if they were pleased with the interventions provided by knowledgeable school administration, 14 participants (46.7%) responded yes and 16 participants (53.3%) responded no.

The final section of the survey involves the construct of school climate. The questions in this section examine the participants' general opinion of school safety. One-hundred and eighty-four participants responded to this section of the survey.

1. When asked whether bullying is a problem at the school, 46 participants (25.0%) responded that bullying is a major problem, 107 participants (58.2%) responded that bullying is a minor problem, and 31 participants (16.8%) responded that bullying is no problem at all.

2. When asked about how well adults deal with bullying, 63 participants (34.2%) responded that adults dealt with bullying issues excellently, 90 participants (48.9%) responded that adults dealt with bullying issues okay, and 31 participants (16.8%) responded that adults dealt with bullying issues poorly.
3. When asked if they feel safe from bullies while at school, 112 participants (60.9%) responded yes and 72 participants (39.1%) responded no.

Qualitative Results

The School Bullying Survey included two sections in which students could give qualitative answers regarding bullying. The survey sections of (1) where bullying incidences occur and (2) an area for additional comments and suggestions provided participants opportunities to be specific regarding bullying behavior and possible interventions and/or ideas.

Based upon the responses regarding where bullying occurs, many of the participants who experience bullying reported locations of occurrence in areas and at times where supervision tends to be traditionally minimal. The most common places included:

- On the school bus – 79 participants
- At P.E and/or playground – 54 participants
- In the hall/at the lockers – 54 participants
- In the restroom – 48 participants

Other participants reported bullying occurring in locations including:

- In class – 43 participants

- Online – 38 participants
- At the bus stop – 24 participants

Many respondents indicated multiple locations and areas.

The survey also provided a section for participants to include their own ideas, comments, and/or suggestions. Not all written comments were negative. Some participants stated positive things about their respective schools. Most participants shared suggestions about what to do and/or how to handle bullying and bullies. The following are responses written by some of the participants:

- A box is needed for people to report bullying and where.
- Teachers need to pay more attention.
- The school is okay mostly, but some students pick on others and that needs to stop.
- I think the teachers do a good job of stopping bullying when they see it happen.
- Kids get picked on all the time, we all should try to stop it from happening.
- Teachers should not show favoritism to other students because sometimes the favorites are the ones bullying.
- There should be a way to report bullying without everyone knowing who reported.
- The principal here is really nice and listens to you if you have a problem with bullying.
- Bullying is bad and people should not do it.

Multivariate Analysis

The use of a multivariate analysis (MANOVA) allows for the examining effects of one or more independent variables on multiple dependent variables. For the present study, the dependent variables are derived from a 10-question section of the School Bullying Survey intended to determine the extent of bullying behavior by type (five types; two questions per type). The bullying types represented are: physical, verbal, social/relational, sexual, and cyber. The independent variables for the study were grade, gender, and ethnicity. The independent variable of age was eliminated because of the close correlation with grade did not warrant the use of it as a separate independent variable. The variable ethnicity was also transformed from including: White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other to only including White and Black participants because the cohorts for the other ethnicities yielded too few numbers to run statistical analysis.

A multivariate analysis of variables was conducted on the dependent variables of physical bullying, verbal bullying, social bullying, sexual bullying, and cyber bullying. The independent variables were grade, gender, and ethnicity. Using Wilks's Lambda criterion to determine differences (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006), the dependent variable of bullying was significantly affected by gender, grade, and the effect of gender × grade (see Table 13).

Table 13

Multivariate Analysis of Variables for Bullying Measure

Independent Variables	Wilks's Λ	Sig. (*p*)
Grade	.840	.002
Gender	.925	.033
Ethnicity	.998	.996
Grade × Gender	.871	.018
Grade × Ethnicity	.985	.802
Gender × Ethnicity	.968	.885
Ethnicity × Grade × Gender	.953	.670

Analysis of Variance and Follow-up Analysis

Multiple univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted on each dependent measure separately to determine the focus of the statistically significant multivariate effect. The dependent measure of bullying was disaggregated by type (physical, verbal, social, sexual, cyber). The independent variables were grade, gender, and the effect of grade × gender interaction as they were the independent variables that resulted in significance from the MANOVA data. Table 14 displays the F values and *p* values for the between-subjects univariate ANOVA's.

Table 14

Univariate Analysis of Variables for Bullying by Type

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables				
	Physical	Verbal	Social	Cyber	Sexual
	F / Sig.[a]	F / Sig.[a]	F / Sig.[a]	F / Sig.[a]	F / Sig.[a]
Grade	7.624 / .001[b]	2.212 / .113	2.767 / .066	.895 / .411	1.770 / .174
Gender	4.933 / .028[b]	.152 / .697	.388 / .534	1.191 / .277	1.260 / .263
Grade × Gender	3.659 / .028[b]	.601 / .550	2.941 / .056	1.433 / .242	.602 / .549

[a] = $p < .05$

[b] = Variables were significant at $p < .05$

Based on the results from the univariate ANOVA's, the dependent variable of physical bullying was significantly affected by grade, gender, and the effect of the grade × gender interaction. The results shown in Table 15 indicate the mean results for each gender and grade groups. The results revealed that overall boys were more likely to engage in physical bully than girls and the most physical bullying occurred in grades six and seven.

Table 15

Mean Comparisons for Bullying by Type and Group Dynamic

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables				
	Physical[a]	Verbal[a]	Social[a]	Cyber[a]	Sexual[a]
Male	1.05 (.85)	1.26 (.75)	1.09 (.94)	.23 (.47)	.46 (.69)
Female	.72 (.78)	1.23 (.80)	1.15 (.85)	.35 (.57)	.52 (.68)
6th Grade	.90 (.81)	1.29 (.79)	1.16 (.86)	.29 (.53)	.55 (.70)
7th Grade	.90 (.86)	1.29 (.80)	1.25 (.84)	.33 (.57)	.52 (.74)
8th Grade	.53 (.68)	1.05 (.75)	.88 (.91)	.33 (.53)	.35 (.53)

[a] Values indicate means and standard deviations

The interaction between grade level and gender indicates that the effects of grade level and gender depend on each other. Figure 1 illustrates means for the interaction effect between grade and gender as measured by the dependent variable physical bullying. While the rate of physical bullying for females is similar in all three grades, the rate for boys is much higher in grades 6 and 7.

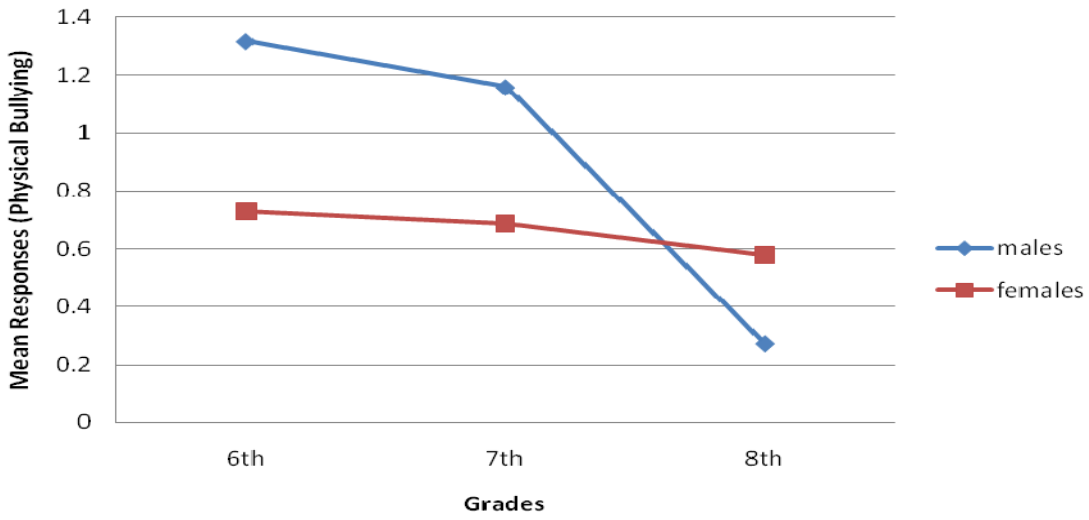

Figure 1. Simple Effect Means of Reported Physical Bullying by Gender and Grade

To further examine the interaction effect, simple effects analysis were conducted. That is, the effects of grade level were examined separately for boys and girls and the effects of gender were examined at each grade level. The means, standard deviation, F values and *p* values for the between groups analysis of grade and gender are displayed in Table 16. Significance was found between gender and grade level as it relates to physical bullying (see Table 16). There was a significant difference in reporting physical bullying between boys and girls in grades 6 and 7. In both grades, boys reported more physical bullying than girls. In addition, an effect for grade level was found for boys (males). More specifically, boys in grades 6 and 7 reported more physical bullying compared to boys in 8th grade.

Table 16

Simple Effect Analysis for Grade and Gender Groups by Physical Bullying

	Means (SD)	F (*p*)	Post-hoc Findings
Males		7.775 (.001)	
Grade 6	1.315 (.749)		Grade 6, 7 > 8
Grade 7	1.200 (.834)		
Grade 8	.272 (.467)		
Females		.350 (.705)	
Grade 6	.729 (.761)		
Grade 7	.686 (.832)		
Grade 8	.577 (.703)		
Grade 6		8.599 (.004)	
Males	1.316 (.749)		Males > Females
Females	.729 (.762)		
Grade 7		4.856 (.032)	
Males	1.200 (.834)		Males > Females
Females	.685 (.832)		
Grade 8		1.723 (.198)	
Males	.273 (.467)		
Females	.577 (.703)		

Summary

Descriptive results, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA), and post-hoc analysis all contributed in providing the researcher imformation regarding the survey instrument (School Bullying Survey) and the topic of the current study (bullying). The data provided by the present study allows the researcher to interpret some possible areas of importance as it relates to bullying in rural middle school students.

V. DISCUSSION

Overview

The purposes of the present study were to use the School Bullying Survey (Williams, 2007) to determine the extent of bullying behavior in rural middle schools and to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference by gender when comparing perceptions of bullying by type (Social/Relational, Sexual, Cyber, Physical, and Verbal)?

2. Is there a significant difference by race/ethnicity when comparing perceptions of bullying by type (Social/Relational, Sexual, Cyber, Physical, and Verbal)?

3. Is there a significant difference by grade when comparing perceptions of bullying by type (Social/Relational, Sexual, Cyber, Physical, and Verbal)?

These questions were developed as a result of the gap in the current bullying literature regarding the scope of bullying behavior by type and various demographics.

Data were collected from the students of three participating rural middle schools (School one, School two, School three) as permitted by each school's principal (see Appendix A). The students were required to return a signed Parent Permission Form (see Appendix B) and a completed copy of the School Bullying Survey (see Appendix C), in order for their survey to be included in the study. A total of 186 cases met the criteria for inclusion in the study. Descriptive statistics, multivariate analysis, univariate analysis,

and follow-up/post-hoc analyses were conducted and reported in association with the independent measures of grade, gender, and ethnicity; and the dependent variables of bullying type (physical, verbal, social, sexual, and cyber). Based on a strong correlation with grade, age was eliminated as an independent variable; thereby, eliminating research question four. Lastly, the number of cohorts initially included with the independent variable of ethnicity was adjusted as indicated by the participants' survey responses. The number of ethnicity cohorts was decreased from five (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other) to two (White and Black) as representation from the eliminated cohorts were too small to include.

Discussion of Results

The School Bullying Survey Results

As it relates to bullying experiences, more than half of the students (55.9%) indicate that they have been bullied before, which is consistent with the idea that bullying is so wide-spread that it is generally ignored (Fried & Fried, 1996). A lower percentage of weekly bullying (10.8%) was reported on this survey than the national study conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2003), which participants reported weekly bullying occurring at 17%.

Participants who were bullied within a thirty day period of receiving the survey were asked to report detailed information regarding the type of bullying experienced. Seventeen percent of students reported being bullied within the thirty day window of completing the survey. Of the seventeen percent of students who reported bullying in the

past 30 days, 11.6% of them reported being bullied more than five times during the required period.

The School Bullying Survey provided data that allows the author to compare conventional wisdom in field of bullying with the results from the present study. As reported by students who experienced bullying within a thirty day period of taking the survey, bullying generally occurs in the hallways and bathrooms of the school. Results from the School Bullying Survey indicate that for those who identified themselves as victims, identify those who bully them as boys (38.8%), girls (29.6%), or both (31.6%). Eighty-seven percent of participants who are victims of bullying report that they are bullied by same-age or older peers. Seventy-five percent of victims indicated being bullied by peers who are the same size or larger. The results indicating age and size statistics from participants who self identify as victims give credence to the idea that bullying occurs because of an imbalance of power.

Reporting bullying in schools has long been considered inconsistent (McCabe & Martin, 2005; Rigby, 1996). The lack of reporting bullying can be attributed to the idea that it is considered a minor problem and something everyone will experience (Fried & Fried, 1996). Sixty-nine percent of victims reported that they felt as if school administrators were not aware of bullying. For the 31% of victim/participants who responded that administrators where aware of bullying, 53% of them indicated that they were not pleased with results of the interventions by the administration.

As previously stated, the bullying is still widely thought of as a minor problem. When asked how serious the problem of bullying is in their school, a majority (58.2%) indicated that they felt bullying was a minor problem. These results affirm the status quo

in regards to the seriousness of bullying in schools. The results from the question of how serious bullying behavior is viewed, is further implicated by participants responses on the question asking whether adults handle bullying well. Eighty-three percent responded that adults handle bullying either excellent or okay. Recently, much has been reported regarding the question of school safety. High profile incidents of school violence have caused some to question whether students feel safe in their respective schools. A majority of the students (60.9%) in the present study reported that they feel safe in school. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2003) reported that in their study, 19% of participants stated they bullied others weekly. In the present study, 13% of participants reported bullying others, which is relatively consistent with the findings from others.

Research Questions Discussion

As stated earlier in this chapter, four research questions were to be examined using the survey instrument (The School Bullying Survey) to collect data on the five bullying constructs (physical, verbal, social, sexual, and cyber) as the dependent variables and four demographic constructs (gender, ethnicity, grade, and age) as the independent variables. One of the independent variables (age) was eliminated based on the strong significant correlation with another independent variable (grade) (see Chapter 4, Multivariate Analysis section). After data analysis associated with each research question, the author can accept a majority of the null hypotheses, while rejecting only two. Table 16 summarizes the research results for each thread of each research question.

Table 16

Acceptance or Rejection of Null Hypotheses

Independent Variables[a]	Dependent Variables				
	Physical	Verbal	Social	Sexual	Cyber
Grade	Reject	Retain	Retain	Retain	Retain
Gender	Reject	Retain	Retain	Retain	Retain
Ethnicity	Retain	Retain	Retain	Retain	Retain

a. The independent variable of age was removed from study because of strong correlation with grade.

Multivariate analyses (MANOVA) were conducted to determine if differences between each independent variable and within each variables cohort were significant. Conducting MANOVA's allowed the researcher to make a determination on whether to accept or reject each null hypothesis and to further examine the significances if necessary. There was only one dependent variable (physical bullying) that was significantly affected by any of independent variables (gender and grade) or interactions between (gender × grade) (see Table 13).

Univariate analysis revealed that gender was statistically significant when measured by physical bullying ($F = 4.933$, $p = .028$), thereby indicating a rejection of part of null hypothesis one ($\mu_{gender1} = \mu_{gender2} \times$ physical bullying). The findings from the univariate analysis of gender by bullying type furthers the conclusions made by other researchers in that males tend to use physical bullying more than females (Garrett, 2003).

See Figure 1 for a visual representation of mean responses from males and females regarding physical bullying.

Statistical significance (F = 7.624, p = .001) was found between grade and physical bullying after conducting a univariate analysis, resulting in rejection of part of null hypothesis three ($\mu_{grade1} = \mu_{grade2} = \mu_{grade3} \times$ physical bullying). Figure one illustrates the differences in mean responses by grade regarding physical bullying. As shown, results show a steep decline in physical bullying by the time the students reach 8th grade. This is particularly true for male respondents. These findings lend support to the reports that physical bullying decreases as students get older (or in this case progress in grade and age levels) when bullying is believed to become more sophisticated (Coloroso, 2003; Espelage & Swearer, 2004).

The interaction effect of grade and gender were found to be statistically significant (F = 3.659, p = .028) when measured by physical bullying. Figure one visualizes the interactive effects of grade and gender as they relate to physical bullying. The figure shows that 6th and 7th grade males report physical bullying at higher rates than 6th and 7th grade females, however that interaction reverses once males and females reach the 8th grade.

The acceptance of most of the null hypotheses support some of the previous literature that suggest that there are no significant differences across groups in the area of ethnicity (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2003) and the idea that bullying generally occurs even across a number of demographic groups.

Implications

The present study was designed to provide detailed information regarding how rural middle school students perceive their personal experiences with bullying behavior and the frequency that various bullying types occur. The implications of this study include: (1) close the gap in the literature regarding bullying behavior started by other researchers; (2) providing the participating schools with results from the responses of their respective students about bullying behavior in the school and how they feel about the overall school climate; and (3) the possible development and implementation of intervention strategies to decrease bullying behavior and improve the school climate for all students.

There are a number of intervention strategies that are proven to work in schools (Olwues Bullying Program, PBIS…); however, without assessment of the extent in which bullying occurs in any particular school, it is impossible to maximize effective improvements. The intent of the researcher was to add to the research field improved assessment options while maximizing the potential outcomes from bullying assessment.

Limitations

Limitations of the present study could have been a factor in the results obtained. The use of self-report surveys have always included inherent limitations. For the purposes of bullying assessment, having students report how much bullying happens to them and how much bullying each student is individually responsible for requires honest answers. It is possible that responses to being bullied could have been inflated, while responses to being the bully could be depressed.

The scope of the present study was limited to rural middle schools in the south, and specifically to two states. This limits the generalizability of the results to similar demographics and locations. Similarly, the survey was conducted during the final month of school. While the principals of each school were eager participants, the students (and possibly parents) could have been pre-occupied, distracted, or disinterested in completing the survey entirely or accurately responding to the questions.

As with all instrumentation, validity must be established. The author did not run a factor analysis of the measurement instrument; therefore, how well the questions correlate and load into factors is not known. A larger number of participants are needed to run a factor analysis which will establish reliability and validity data.

Lastly, the issue of defining bullying and bullying types may influence survey results, in turn, affecting data analysis. The School Bullying Survey provided the definition of bullying in general; however, definitions of bullying by type were not included. Misinterpretations of what constitutes each type of bullying may have affected the responses from the participants, either positively or negatively.

Future Research Directions

A number of future research strands can be derived from the results of the current study and through a re-examination of the current research available. Future research might include broadening the scope of demographics on a larger scale. There have been few studies, particularly in the United States that can be considered large scale or comprehensive. Most of the in-depth data and research have been for relatively small or

nuanced groups of participants. A better representation of groups could yield improved results which could be used to further improve bullying intervention.

The need for improved instrumentation is essential in addressing the needs of those who feel victimized by bullying behavior. As the scope of this present study did not include intervention strategies, it would be highly remiss of the author to exclude the need for more bullying intervention research. Future researchers should contend to create better bullying assessment instruments.

Other areas of research needed include assessing parents and school personnel (including administration) relative to their perceptions of bullying behavior in schools. By assessing adults who have direct connections to the students, comparisons can be made regarding where the gaps in knowledge and information are regarding bullying behavior and school climate. Finally, it may be helpful to explore the policies and procedures (or lack thereof) that each school has regarding how to handle bullying behavior and bullies. Analyzing the need to create, add, or improve on current policy about bullying and allowing student input could help create an improved school climate for all students.

Recommendations

Based on the current study, the author will propose a number of recommendations relating to research regarding bullying behavior. These recommendations are designed to open dialog and discussion regarding the findings in the present study. The author also contends that the data presented in association with the research, lead to increased focus

on implications and directions previously discussed. The author intends to encourage the practical application of the each recommendation for further study and dialog.

As the focus of the study was assessing bullying behavior, attention should be paid improving measurement of bullying behavior in and out of school. Unlike other fields of research (i.e. behavior assessment), there are no bullying assessments that can be considered the standard bearer for this area of study. There are a number of bullying assessments available; however, they are products that are usually attached to commercial bullying intervention programs or they are limited to the theoretical framework of the developing researcher. While instrument reliability and validity are generally reported for each survey developed, without an established standard measurement instrument, there is no basis for correlational comparisons between instruments for measuring bullying behavior. Greater focus should be placed on improving the current bullying assessment instruments available, developing better assessment tools, and/or finding ways to increase assessment participation to include a broader cross-section of society (particularly in the United States).

Assessments regarding bullying behavior are mostly self-report surveys. As with any self-report measure, the questions of how truthful are participants' responses determine the validity of the instrument. The majority of the instruments to measure bullying behavior are designed to identify victims of bullying. A scant few attempt to identify students who readily admit to being bullies themselves. The author contends that bullying/victimization assessment alone should not constitute the true level of bullying in any setting or for any individual. Multiple assessment instruments, measuring multiple internal and external factors should be conducted to provide a more robust account of

bullying/victimization. Personality profiles may be developed using multiple assessments, thereby allowing for more focused intervention strategies.

Those individuals who identify themselves as victims are usually the focus of assessment and intervention. Interventions for victims of bullying tend to fall into two broad categories that either focus on pre-emptive school-wide discussions regarding bullying behavior or helping victims find coping strategies for bullying. The interventions as they relate to bullies are mostly punitive measures aimed at perpetrators of bullying behavior. In extreme cases, some bullies are provided professional attention through counseling or related services; however, most bullies are relegated to alternative education placements or expulsion. The author recommends that better, more inclusive interventions strategies be developed that focus on bullies as well as victims.

Lastly, bullying behavior is not exclusive to school-age children. Workplace bullying is also a burgeoning field of study. The emergence of research focused on adult bullying behavior and victimization dispels the credence of bullying being a “rite of passage”. The author suggests that research strands be investigated related to workplace bullying, the correlation of bully/victim identification from school to workplace, and/or the correlational analysis of successful intervention strategies for bullying behavior in educational settings and work settings.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL LETTER

PARENT COPY

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION, REHABILITATION, COUNSELING/SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 5/13/09 to 5/13/10 Protocol # 09-110 EP 0905

NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS AN APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT

PARENTAL PERMISSION/CONSENT
for a Research Study entitled
"Rural Middle School Students Perceptions of Bullying"

Your child is invited to participate in a research study to determine the significance of bullying and bullying type at their respective school. The study is being conducted by Jonte' C. Taylor (JT), Ph.D. Candidate, under the direction of Dr. E. D. Martin in the Auburn University Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling. Your child was selected as a possible participant because he or she is a student at a participating school. Since your child is age 18 or younger we must have your permission to include him/her in the study.

What will be involved if your child participates?
If you decide to allow your child to participate in this research study, your child will be asked to complete a survey regarding their experiences with bullying at school. Your child's total time commitment will be approximately 10 - 15 minutes.

Are there any risks or discomforts?
The risks associated with participating in this study are coercion and emotional distress. To minimize these risks, we will only allow students to participate and receive the survey if your permission is given and your child may discontinue participation at any time. We will provide interventions and strategies for the school counselors to deal with bullying that may occur in the school. Counselors will also have referral information if your child experiences distress due to bullying. You are responsible for any costs associated with medical treatment for your child.

Are there any benefits to your child or others?
Although there are no direct benefits to your child, your child can expect to provide valuable information about bullying problems in his/her school. We/I cannot promise you that your child will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Will you or your child receive compensation for participating?
There are no costs for participation. There is also no compensation for participation in this study.

Are there any costs?
If you decide to allow your child to participate, you will not be required to pay a fee or provide any other items.

If you (or your child) change your mind about your child's participation, your child can be withdrawn from the study at any time. Your child's participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw your child, your child's data can be withdrawn as

2084 HALEY CENTER
AUBURN, AL 36849-5222

TELEPHONE:
334-844-7676

FAX:
334-844-7677

Parent/Guardian Initials _____ 1 of 2

PARENT COPY

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION, REHABILITATION, COUNSELING/SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to allow your child to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize you or your child's future relations with Auburn University, the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling or your child's school.

Your child's privacy will be protected. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. The data collected will be protected by anonymity and by lock and key. Information obtained through your child's participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement, published in a professional journal, presented at a professional meeting, and conduct further research on bullying. If so, no information will be presented that could identify your child.

If you (or your child) have questions about this study, please ask them now or contact Jonte' C. Taylor (JT), at (334) 887-1039 and jtdiw@yahoo.com or taylo09@auburn.edu or Dr. E. D. Martin at (334) 844-2076. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH FOR YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE.

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 5/13/09 to 5/13/10 Protocol # 09-110 EP 0905

Parent/Guardian's Name (Print)

Parent/Guardian's Name (Signature) Date

Child's Name (Print) Date

Investigator's Name (Print)

Investigator's Name (Signature) 5/17/09 Date

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Parent/Guardian Initials _____

APPENDIX B

SCHOOL BULLYING SURVEY

School Bullying Survey

We want our school to be a better place to learn and live. Please answer the following questions about the way people behave toward one another in our school. By answering these questions, you are helping use learn about problems our school might have. If problems are identified, something can be done to improve the situation. No information that can identify you is being collected and your individual responses will not be shared, so please answer honestly.

Use the following definition of bullying to answer the questions.

Bullying is any repeated, intentional act by a person you consider more powerful than yourself (whether by age, grade, size, status, or gender) which causes you embarrassment, pain, or discomfort.

Check your answer:

1. Have you ever been bullied? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Have you ever been bullied at this school? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Have you been bullied at this school during the past year? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Have you been bullied at this school during the past month? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Have you been bullied at this school during the past week? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Answer the following questions based on your experiences during the past 30 days.

6. How many times have you been threatened, teased, or rumored about by text message? ☐ 0 ☐ 1-2 ☐ 3-4 ☐ 5+
7. How many times have you been called names by others? ☐ 0 ☐ 1-2 ☐ 3-4 ☐ 5+
8. How many times have you been physically threatened or intimidated by others? ☐ 0 ☐ 1-2 ☐ 3-4 ☐ 5+
9. How many times have you been excluded or left out on purpose? ☐ 0 ☐ 1-2 ☐ 3-4 ☐ 5+
10. How many times have you experienced unwelcome sexual comments, gestures, or touching? ☐ 0 ☐ 1-2 ☐ 3-4 ☐ 5+

School Bullying Survey (continued)

11. How many times have you been teased or threatened on a social network site or chat room? ☐0 ☐1-2 ☐3-4 ☐5+

12. How many times have you been ignored on purpose? ☐0 ☐1-2 ☐3-4 ☐5+

13. How many times have you been called names regarding your gender or sexual orientation? ☐0 ☐1-2 ☐3-4 ☐5+

14. How many times have you been teased in a way that made you feel uncomfortable? ☐0 ☐1-2 ☐3-4 ☐5+

15. How many times have you been hit, pushed, or kicked? ☐0 ☐1-2 ☐3-4 ☐5+

16. Check the box next to each place where you have been bullied during the past month.

- ☐ On the school bus
- ☐ In the hall/at the lockers
- ☐ At P.E. or on the playground
- ☐ At the bus stop
- ☐ Walking to or from school
- ☐ Walking between buildings
- ☐ In the restroom
- ☐ In the classroom
- ☐ In the locker room
- ☐ In the lunchroom
- ☐ On the Internet/cell phone
- ☐ Other _____

If you have been bullied during the past 30 days, answer questions 17-21. If not, skip ahead to #22.

17. The bullying I received was from:

☐ Boys ☐ Girls ☐ Both

18. The person or people bullying me were:

☐ Younger ☐ Older peers ☐ Same age ☐ Adults ☐ More than one age

19. The students who bullied me were:

☐ Bigger peers ☐ Smaller peers ☐ Same size ☐ More than one size

20. Were school officials or administrators aware of the bullying?

☐ Yes ☐ No

21. If yes, were you pleased with the way school officials handled the

☐ Yes ☐ No

School Bullying Survey (continued)

All students answer the following questions.

22. Overall, how much of a problem is bullying at school?
☐ Major ☐ Minor ☐ No Problem

23. How well do adults deal with bullying at school?
☐ Excellently ☐ Okay ☐ Poorly

24. Do you feel safe from bullies at our school?
☐ Yes ☐ No

25. Do you admire or like bullies?
☐ Yes ☐ No

26. Do you know how to report bullying?
☐ Yes ☐ No

27. Would you be willing to report bullying problems to school officials?
☐ Yes ☐ No

28. Have you, bullied another student during the past 30 days?
☐ Yes ☐ No

Please write down any additional information, comments or suggestions that you feel will help our school improve in the way we treat one another:

Check the appropriate box.

Gender
☐ Male ☐ Female

Ethnicity
☐ White ☐ Black ☐ Hispanic ☐ Asian ☐ Other _____

Grade
☐ 6th Grade ☐ 7th Grade ☐ 8th Grade

Age Range
☐ 10 - 11 ☐ 12 - 13 ☐ 14 - 15 ☐ Other _____

Thank you for filling out this survey!